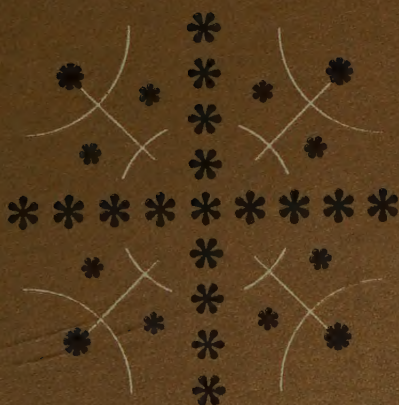


# italian

q u a r t e r l y



IV: 16

\$1.25



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## q u a r t e r l y

VOLUME 4

NUMBER 16

Winter 1961

The Italian Quarterly is sponsored by UCLA and by the Dante Alighieri Society of Los Angeles. Subscription rates: \$4.50 a year in advance or \$8.00 for two years, in advance. Single copies \$1.25 each. All communications and manuscripts should be addressed to Editor Carlo L. Golino, Department of Italian, University of California, Los Angeles 24, California.

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## Contents

John Freccero	<i>Mythos and Logos: The Moon and the Bonfires</i>	3
Renée Riese Hubert	<i>French Notes on Two Italian Painters</i>	17
Mario Mirri	<i>On Antonio Pace's Benjamin Franklin and Italy</i>	24

## Trends

Carlo L. Golino	<i>Italian Literary Prizes— 1960 Edition</i>	43
-----------------	--	----

## Books 56

*Pirandello and the French Theater* [Neal Oxenhandler]; *Moravian Modulations* [P. M.P.]; *Times in Rome* [E. F. Mengel]; *A New Book on Giotto* [Karl M. Birkmeyer].

## Index to Volume IV 68



## Mythos and Logos: The Moon and the Bonfires

JOHN FRECCERO

[Professor Freccero, who teaches in the Department of Romance Languages at Johns Hopkins, has written on Dante and is now composing a book on the modern Italian novel.]

The foundling who has returned from America to his boyhood hills and who tells the story of Cesare Pavese's *The Moon and the Bonfires*, will never find the answer to the familiar question with which the novel begins:

Who knows of what flesh I am made? I've traveled enough through the world to know that all flesh is equally good, and worth the same, but it is for this reason that you get tired, and try to put down roots, to make for yourself a land and a country, so that your flesh will mean something and last a little longer than a simple turn of the seasons.

To search for enduring flesh is to seek permanence in that which by definition belongs to the world of change. For this reason the narrator will end the novel much as he began it: a bastard and a wanderer until his winter comes. Spring is the season of another generation, and it is man's tragedy to know that roots are at once the substance of life and the furthest removed from it — but tragedy is too big a word for leaves.

The Virgilian comparison of generations of men to leaves, and of life to a simple round of the seasons, is a familiar one in Italian narrative of the twentieth century. When Padrone 'Ntoni of the Malavoglia sits in the courtyard of the house by the medlar tree watching the falling leaves, he too sees in them the fate of all men and of the

Malavoglia family, but in Giovanni Verga's world there is neither quiet compassion nor detachment from the world of change. There is only the agony of one leaf for another, and the conviction that man must remain rooted in order to survive. As the house is rooted beside the tree, so are the Malavoglia, and this is at once their life and their doom.

It matters little whether the *paese* be the bleak Sicilian coast of Giovanni Verga, or the rich Sienese *podere* of Federigo Tozzi, or the rugged hills of Pavese's Piedmont: it remains one's land and home. To leave it is to seek a liberty and a transcendence whose price is death, for to feel one's individuality is at the same time to feel isolated from all that other men mean by life. And yet real life seems precisely an aspiration to transcendence and a search for freedom. "To live among people," Pavese wrote in his diary, in a fleeting moment of artistic *hybris*, "is to feel one's self a battered leaf. There comes the need to isolate one's self, to escape from all determinism. . . ." At the same time, however, there is a comfort, a winter-warmth, in avoiding the illusory hope of an authentic life which is in fact death. In a poem entitled "Wind of March" he wrote:

Cold was the earth  
under pale skies  
in a torpid dream  
as one who suffers no more.  
Even the frost was sweet  
deep within the heart.  
Between life and death  
hope remained silent.

Unlike Eliot's April, the cruelty of Pavese's spring is that it inverts the Pauline admonition in a terrible way: unless a man attempt to live he does not die.

If the word "regionalism" has specific meaning when applied to those Italian novels which claim Verga as their ancestor, then perhaps it indicates the attempt to relate human transcendence to irrational, violent, and yet familiar surroundings. In the choice of primitive surroundings as



background for the struggle, one perceives an attempt to isolate a metaphysical situation in a rural control laboratory, free of complexities and of the false confidence inspired by urban life. Too often Italian regionalism of Pavese's kind is read simply as grim travel literature. But the best of it is as universal as the best of all literature, and this, one feels certain, is true of *The Moon and the Bonfires*, (*La luna e i falò*), for its central problem is the problem of all men.

It is characteristic of Pavese that he would have us know his problem's solution, at least symbolically, right from the beginning of the novel. Men are as leaves, true enough, but an epigram introducing the book leads us to believe that some of them will attain a certain nobility: "Man must endure/his going hence e'en as his coming hither./Ripeness is all." The achievement of that ripeness is the novelist's standard for measuring the dignity of man. Nature balances maturity "for a brief tragic instant," and the glory of the moment is worth the tremendous cost. In his diary he wrote:

The most mild and calm and soft of the seasons, autumn, replaces its predecessor and establishes itself with fearsome upheavals, wild thunderstorms, darkness at dawn, whirlwinds and havoc of leaves that give us to understand the violent price of ripeness.

The greater part of a man's life is spent in a world of time, where things and events succeed one another in a linear and therefore irrational progression. Man's anguish stems from a principle of his being which impels him to break free from this uninterrupted chain toward an ecstatic moment in which he may grasp the truth and realize his liberty. This movement necessarily entails his death, but death understood in this sense is affirmation, for it is the closing of nature's circle which begins in a movement toward fruition and ends by preparing the way for another maturity. The time of nature is the time of eternity, for the cycle is eternally present and gives meaning to each separate point along its course.

The narrator of Pavese's story comes to understand this, but in doing so forever excludes himself from participation in the drama he witnesses. As the novel begins he has come back to the hill of Gaminella, as to a sacred place. For him the primitive countryside embodies an eternal quality: "It pleased me because here all things ended, because it was the last country where the seasons, and not the years, followed upon each other." Here things seemed to take upon themselves a universal character, for "on the hills time does not pass." Those who never leave the *paese*, and those who leave never to return, can come to no such comprehension. Only for him who left his home and has now returned, whose life recapitulates the turn of the seasons, is the unity of life perceptible through its successive manifestations. It is his privilege because things are never really understood until they are seen for a second time. "That childhood is poetic," we read in an essay, "is the illusion of an adult mind." Those things which begin as mere sensations in childhood, concrete realities, become in our minds universals. "A forest, a field, a vineyard become *the* forest, *the* field, *the* vineyard." Thus, to return to the place of our childhood is to return to a place where things exist in two dimensions, both as concrete existences, and as essences which will forever be our standards of truth. When these dimensions fuse into a single ecstatic moment, time and eternity meet.

"No one from the *paese* knew these things," the narrator tells us, "except perhaps someone who had gone away." To leave is to learn what *paese* means, and at the same time to shatter its power. He was never so much a part of these hills as were his companions, for he is an orphan, and his many years in America have served only to widen the gap between him and the foster home he revisits: "You've got to have a *paese*, even if only to have the desire to go away. *Paese* means not to be alone, to know that in the people, the trees, the land, there is something of you, something that remains waiting for you, even when you have gone away." In his isolation, the exile-narrator is invaded by a lucid sad-



ness, which contrasts with the passion of Nuto, his boyhood companion and rediscovered friend:

Nuto, who had never really gone away, still wanted to understand the world, change things, break the seasons. Or perhaps not: he still believed in the moon. But I, who did not believe in the moon, I knew that all in all, only the seasons count, and it is the seasons which have made your bones, the seasons you ate when you were a child—Canelli is the whole world—Canelli and the Belbo Valley—and on the hills time does not pass.

The protagonist can never enter into the story, for he stands outside it, and sees life as an unchanging cycle, predetermined, and a unity. Nuto, who is part of that cycle, nevertheless holds on to his faith in progress, his notion of time as an ever-ascending line toward utopia, as the human struggle against the irrational power of the moon, the deity of all the superstitious natives of the hills, including himself.

The narrator is the perfect spectator for having gone to America. When he tells Nuto of the advantages of traveling around the world, the wise native answers him in words much like those Carlyle offered the would-be emigrants of his day: America is here or it is nowhere. One can leave the ritual place and the sacred ground by a mere turning of the head. America, the desert wilderness, is all the things that the Piedmontese hills are not. It is a country as bare as the moon, the protagonist tells us, inhabited by bastards who are eternally harassed by the need for roots. They have not learned to deal with the savage destiny that surrounds them, for they have no tradition to teach them how to dam the stream of the irrational which threatens to engulf them. They know no music, they have no wine, and the narrator tells us that in America he turned in desperation "to take this woman and throw her down upon the grass to give a meaning to the chaos of crickets and stars." An act of violence would at least provide one with an identity. America is destiny untransformed by the human mind: a moon without bonfires.

The scene in which the narrator recalls his isolation in the middle of an American desert is surely one of the most powerful of modern Italian literature. The desert is like a "gray sea," into which the protagonist is plunged, although he is capable, as it were, only of wading along the bank, or at best, of swimming on the surface. In other countries where there is a link with the past, one can lead a surface life with little trouble — one looks at the reflection and does not bother to find out about the depths. Here, however, there are only railroad tracks to relieve the barrenness of the landscape — tracks from which one cannot wander for fear of being forever lost. This gray sea, this moon, is an irrational destiny, allowing of only one traversal, and the buffeting train that passes serves to remind him that "even in a desert these people won't leave you alone. If tomorrow I should have to escape, to avoid being arrested, I would feel the hand of a cop already upon me, like the blast of the train. This was America." Lest we should miss the point that the moon represents all that is terrifying about this land, and about fatality, the chapter ends with this description: "There was a reddish glow . . . between the low clouds a slice of moon had risen which seemed a knife wound and it bloodied the plain. I remained gazing at it for a while. It terrified me."

Nuto believed in the sacredness of destiny and its many-faceted nature. "You've got to believe in the moon," he says. "Try to cut down a pinetree at the full moon and the worms will rot it for you. You've got to wash out a vat at the new moon. Even grafts — if you don't do them in the first days of the moon, they won't take hold." Destiny has its propitious moment, and to believe in the moon is to be ready to transform the blind powers of nature into one's own will—to act within the framework of the situation, like the farmer or the magician—to transform destiny into liberty. The outcome is never clear, but this much is: destiny is the most personal of all things, for it comes to each man in his own image, when he is ripe.

The narrator, however, is removed in time from the

situation. He is a mere spectator, and for this reason he has no name: "the American" — "eel" — "call me Ishmael," he might have said, for like Melville's narrator, he is outside the picture. The most obvious reason for this isolation and his conviction that the course of things is inflexibly determined is technical: the story is told in retrospect by a narrator who knows the ending. Pavese the craftsman left some thoughts on the subject in his diary:

The equilibrium of a story is in the coexistence of two persons: one is the author, who knows how it will end, the other the characters, who do not know. If author and protagonist are one (*Je*) and they know how it will end, it is necessary to elevate the stature of the characters in order to reestablish the equilibrium. Therefore the protagonist, if he tells the story, must be more than anything else a spectator.

But this is simply the technical reflection of a far deeper preoccupation. "We are in this word," Pavese wrote in the last year of his life, "to transform destiny into liberty." From the perspective of some omniscient author-God, all may seem mapped-out and predetermined. For man, however, truth is a response to life, and if it is more limited and more naive than the truth of the worldly-wise outsider, it is at any rate far more ennobling. Truth in this sense, as it is lived by Pavese's other characters, has for its name Destiny. Like the Christian God, it has foreknowledge, but does not foreordain. At the moment of his maturity, man grapples with destiny, without knowing what it is, and transforms it into his own decision. One of Pavese's last poems dwells upon the theme:

You do not know the hills  
Upon which blood was shed.  
All of us retreated  
all of us threw down  
our arms and our names. A woman  
watched us flee.  
Only one of us stood his ground



with clenched fists, saw the empty sky,  
lowered his head and died beneath the wall.  
Now he is a blood-soaked cloth and his name.  
A woman is waiting for us up there in the hills.

In order to meet one's destiny and transform it into choice, one cannot know that the inevitable will come to pass irrespective of man's response. Yet, it is the protagonist's duty (and that of the artist, according to Pavese) to give order to chaos and to see the inexorable in human affairs. This can only be accomplished from a detached perspective, and the narrator, because of his role, is perforce condemned to isolation from the beginning. Every other character must at some time choose between real identity, gained through his struggle with destiny, and cowardly, anonymous flight.

Early in the novel, the villagers discover the bodies of Fascist soldiers, killed up on the hill by the Partisans three years ago, and now washed down, mingled with the mud and stones of which they were composed. "They did not bear fruit in their lifetimes and they will not bear fruit now," says Valino, a wretched farmer who will meet destiny in his own way. The soldiers were merely obeying orders, and they died like the leaves from which they are now scarcely distinguishable. They therefore will remain nameless, past all identification. One person ascended that hill, however, never to come down, and her name, which was all she left behind, was Santa. In her youth, the narrator knew her as scarcely more than a child—Santina, she was called—but now, after the war, he learns that she became a strong-willed woman who betrayed first the Fascists and then the Partisans, and was killed by the latter as a necessary sacrifice of the old order for the sake of the new. Her death was a sacrifice and not a vengeance, for she all but wished it upon herself, dying for her own independence. In death her name lost the diminutive and became Santa—and the Partisans who killed her at the moment of her maturity loved her deeply. Their final act of love was to burn her body so that it might not be defiled and so that her death might help bring forth the fruit of their revolution, just as

the ritual bonfires of their ancestors propitiated other gods and to this day the farmers light bonfires to enrich the earth.

Santa fought for her independence and defied the destiny which so clearly awaited her. "There are evil people in Canelli," she tells Nuto. "If they could, they'd set a fire to me . . . They won't have a woman not live the life of a fool . . . they'd like me to kiss the hand that strikes me down. But I'll bite that hand." Santa's tragedy is that she does not realize whose hand it is that strikes her down, and she will fight destiny to the last, to become a martyr for human individuality against a crushing fate. The old feudal society crumbles with her, for she represents at once its beauty and its ugliness. There is no question here of guilt, however, for she goes to her death clothed in innocent white.

Up there, where the Partisans lived, there is a vineyard in which they symbolically labored. The narrator tells us that, for him, "all plants should bear fruit; that's the way it is in the vineyard." Some ground may be allowed to lie fallow, but the vineyard must always be cultivated, even if it takes many more bonfires "to awaken the earth." One day the god will appear and destiny will be fulfilled again. In the vineyard on Gaminella, Santa and the Partisans touched the absolute. They collaborated as victim and petitioners to call down the god and to introduce an atom of eternity into the course of time. Now, the Partisans and Santa are gone and only Nuto, who loved her and believed in the Partisans, remains to perpetuate their fame. While he declaims against the present state of things, the narrator meditates on the fate that awaits all men: "While he was talking, I saw Gaminella rising up before me, seeming greater still, a hill like a planet. Some day, I thought, we must climb up there."

Some men can evade their Golgotha for a little while by losing themselves in sex, in song, or in art. A sensuous existence can serve to distract from the task of growing to maturity and meeting destiny:

And once more, looking around, I thought of those tufts of plants and of reeds, of those woods, those

banks—all those names of countrysides and sections around there—that are useless and yield no harvest, and yet which have their own beauty—each vineyard its own thicket—and it pleases you to rest your eyes on them and to know of the nests that are there. Women, I thought to myself, are something like that.

The women of the old order, Santa's older sisters from the estate of La Mora, blossomed and bore no fruit. They were the children of the landowners for whom the protagonist first went to work as a boy, on the estate where he saw flowers for the first time: "I understood that flowers are plants just like fruit — they blossomed instead of bearing fruit, and they were plucked to please the *signora* and her daughters, who went out carrying parasols, and when they remained indoors, they arranged flowers in vases." Sylvia and Irene were sustained by the toil of others and passed their time in frivolities. Their beauty was an ephemeral thing and their lives were predictably unhappy. Sylvia, as dark and as passionate as the wood for which she was named, became pregnant, underwent an abortion, and died from its effects. Irene, the fair-haired, peaceful girl, ended her days beaten to death in a hotel room by a merciless husband. Santa, the blond temptress, seemed to combine in her person the qualities of her sisters, and she alone came to fruition among the vine-branches which made up her pyre. The novel ends with the description of her punishment for defying men and destiny:

I looked at the broken black wall of the farm, looked around, and asked Nuto if Santa were buried there. "Is there a chance they'll find her one day? They found those two other bodies . . ."

Nuto had seated himself on the garden wall and looked at me with his self-willed eyes. He shook his head. "No, Santa no," he said. "They won't find her. You couldn't cover a woman like that with a little earth and just leave her there. Too many men still loved her. Baracca took care of it.



He had some branches cut from the vineyard and we covered her up until there was enough. Then we poured gasoline on the pile and set fire to it. By noon, it was all ashes. Last year, the mark was still there, like the bed of a bonfire."

Nuto was profoundly shaken by the death of the woman he loved. Throughout the novel, we are led to suspect that he has had a shattering experience of some sort, which has left him with a revulsion for violence, even in the name of truth and the new socialist order. "He told Santa that these were times in which you had to decide, either here or there, and that he had decided, he was with the deserters, the patriots, the communists." At the same time, however, when the narrator asks him whether he had actually handled a gun, he answers that he could not go into the hills for fear that some spy would return and burn his house. This was not cowardice, but rather the humanitarian instincts of one whose role it was to comfort the Partisans and to rebuild after them, for the future. The narrator asks why there was no revolution after the war: "You people held the knife by the handle." Nuto the carpenter replies, "I had only a plane and a chisel."

Nuto was a musician before the war, famous throughout the region. His father warned him about that "vice"—"a temptation worse than women," he said—and Nuto gave it up when the war came. Music is a way of giving a sense to chaos by evading destiny and the irrational. For this reason the two gypsies who were accused of being spies during the war and were executed by the Partisans, died what is in Pavese's terms a shameful death. The two were suspended in a well and forced to sing like madmen in order to save their lives, but were nevertheless killed in the middle of their song. In Pavese's religion this is a murder of double vendetta, for to sing is to swim upon the surface of the unknown without descending into it. It is a pretense at order and light where there is only chaos and darkness, and to be killed in such a state of evasion is to back into the great moment. There can be no greater mockery at the dignity of man than to rob him of a noble death and to kill him

while he cringes—unless it be the blasphemy of using these deaths, desecrating them for political purposes, as does the village priest. Death bestows dignity on any fool and the priests know it: “With the dead, the priests are always right.”

When his father died, and the war came, Nuto put down his clarinet in order to fulfill his humanitarian mission. After the bloodshed he has seen, he knows that there can be no evasion. Once he was an irresponsible and violent boy; now he protests even the tormenting of a lizard by children: “That’s the way you start, and you end up by slitting one another’s throat and setting fire to the countryside.” He must work within destiny’s framework and rebuild, as foster father to the new order, whose coming into being, in the shape of a crippled boy, is the novel’s central action.

The house that was once the narrator’s foster home was bought by a rich woman and leased to Valino, an old embittered sharecropper with a son named Cinto. The protagonist says of the latter, “He must have been about ten, and to see him standing in the courtyard like that was like seeing myself.” The narrator sought to instill in the boy a wanderlust, a thirst for the outside world. Nuto protested:

“You’re doing wrong,” he said to me. “You’re doing wrong. Why give him those cravings? Anyway, if things don’t change, he’ll always be miserable.”

“If only he knew what he is missing . . . It would have been better for him if he were a bastard,” I said. “To have to go away and make out for himself. So long as he doesn’t go out into the world, he’ll grow up to be like his father.”

“There are many things that need to be changed,” said Nuto.

Here again, the lucid despair of the narrator conflicts with his friend’s desire to see the world changed. The former would have the boy removed from his roots, and if not to

be happy, at least to understand. Nuto, on the other hand, would have him await his destiny there on the hillside.

The protagonist, remembering his own boyhood, buys a pocketknife for Cinto. For the crippled child, the knife comes to represent a defense against a hostile world and a vicious father. "As for my father," he says, "if he takes it from me, I'll kill him." When his father is driven mad by poverty and despair and in a blind fury beats his wife to death and makes for the boy, Cinto opens his knife, threatens his father, and then escapes him. Valino sets fire to the house and the stable, and finally hangs himself in the vineyard.

Destiny called the boy to the vineyard, he struggled with it, and survived. The moment he sees his father hanging, he runs away and drops his knife in the charred ruins of his former home. Cinto, the hobbling hope of the future, has his symbolic birth into a new order from that bonfire: "it seemed to him that he awoke in that moment; he could not remember what he was doing near the bank." He descends as an orphan from the sacred mountain to be accepted as a foundling into the home of Nuto where he will have no more need of a knife. Nuto, who has himself witnessed a bonfire up there, has smelled burning flesh and made contact with the absolute, adopts Cinto, snatched like the physician Asclepius from the funeral pyre of his mother. The boy is spared by destiny, wins his revolution, in order to bring a message with him: after the wounds the world has suffered there is nothing left to rebuild. Gaminella, which is the whole world, has given birth to something new, and a liberated generation rises from the ashes. It remains now for Nuto to teach the boy carpentry and to have his twisted leg made straight.

Nuto saw the death of Santa and could never again contemplate an act of violence. Cinto saw the burning of his home and put down his knife forever. It remains for these two to teach the lesson of brotherly love to the rest of mankind. The two bonfires have served to awaken them into a new life and have therefore done some good in spite of the violence. To believe that the fires have been effi-



cacious is to see the dignity and worth of man. In a Lucianesque dialogue by Pavese called "The Horses," Hermes tells Chiron why it was that Asclepius' mother had to die: "Every time that chaos burgeons up to meet the light—their light—they must strike down, destroy and rebuild." So it was with Santa and with Cinto's father, for the former blasphemed by asserting her individuality as the latter blasphemed by questioning his destiny, and for these acts of impiety, *hybris*, both of them were struck down. The light of the gods is the moon, the force in the cosmos called destiny, which men seek to fashion in their own images. When they assert their individuality and freedom in opposition to it they offend the gods who will then be propitiated only by a human sacrifice. Man answers with his ritual fire, his tragic reply, whereby the mythic forces are given meaning in a brief bright moment. To propitiate the gods is in a sense to manipulate them, to answer their crushing force. If the victory of such a revolution seems pale, and the fire a little thing against the moon, it is nevertheless all that man has, the only weapon against fate that he has been able to fashion from the gift given him by Prometheus.

NOTE: *The Moon and the Bonfires* has been translated by Marianne Ceconi, Signet Books (The New American Library), 1954. Quotations from Pavese's work used in this article, however, are translated by the author. The fundamental article on Pavese's work for the American reader is still Leslie A. Fiedler's "Introducing Cesare Pavese," *Kenyon Review*, XVI, 4 (Autumn, 1954).

## French Notes on Two Italian Painters

RENEE RIESE HUBERT

[Professor Hubert is well known for her three volumes of poetry (*La Cité Borgne*, *Asymptotes*, and *Le Berceau d'Ève*), for her many essays and reviews, and for her pedagogical labors. She now teaches at San Fernando Valley State College.]

### *Giorgio de Chirico and Paul Eluard*

The universe of Giorgio de Chirico contains a paradox. Titles such as "The Melancholy of Departure", "The Uncertainty of the Poet", "The Disquieting Muses", "Nostalgia of the Infinite", "Morning Meditation", "The Anxious Journey", "The Regret", suggest relentless probing, restless search, an overpowering anguish. Yet hardly any figurative painter has made such consistent use of clear-cut contours, sharp-edged angles and straight lines. Tanguy or Miró, for instance, evoke the invisible world of our emotions, dreams and instincts by means of primarily fluid, mobile or tortuous contours. The Italian master, who represented buildings in his early days, disclosed in his *Memorie* the original *piazze* in Turin and Florence which had allegedly inspired him. These towers, churches, stations, fortresses, reduced to simple, often predominantly vertical, lines are not composed of stone, but of such architectural abstractions as arcades, galleries of columns, walls, pillars, openings and narrow rifts. Their sharp outlines may be subjected to rigorous parallelism or they may cut across each other. Sometimes they project themselves forward or withdraw in a menacing angle. However, these barren, self-sufficient façades, bereft, by their exclusion of ornamentation, of incongruous detail, of the mysterious interplay of sunshine and shadow, transcend architecture. Unlike Buffet's linear interpretations of Parisian monuments, "The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon" or "The Enigma of the Hour" cannot be considered

transformations or reductions of the Piazza Santa Croce or Santissima Annunziata or the courtyard of the Brancacci Chapel. The alternations of shapes recurring in these paintings are more closely related to the erotic visions of our dreams than to specific panoramas.

In other canvasses De Chirico represents inanimate objects: assorted cookies spread out on a tin, displays of sewing threads, banana clusters, artichokes. These objects, however familiar, are not endowed with the absolute self-sufficiency they will attain later with Giacometti, René Magritte, Dalí and sometimes Picasso. They are not replete with esoteric symbolism. Moreover, they no more constitute a still-life than the buildings under an immaculate blue sky added up to a landscape. These objects do not possess the cardboard texture which characterizes De Chirico's monuments, which are so reminiscent of stage sets and which create an atmosphere of unreality rather than illusion. Nevertheless, they are reduced to the same unadorned outlines without undergoing the distortions dear to Dalí and Picasso. Although they pertain to our everyday life, the mere fact that they are exposed in all their nakedness within an unfamiliar context makes them somewhat bewildering. Strangely enough, they take on the appearance of ancient relics, as Mr. Soby points out in his study on the painter, especially amidst a décor not entirely devoid of Greek and Roman overtones.

Purely geometrical outlines representing planes, diagrams, surfaces, angles, facets are predominant in other paintings, for instance in the various canvasses entitled "Metaphysical Interior". Eluard, the French surrealist, has included one of them, accompanied by a poem, in his volume *Voir* (a book composed of some 30 texts on contemporary painters, each one accompanied by an illustration.) The painting is definitely representational; pieces of wooden frames, fragments of easels, linoleum patches overlapping, criss-crossing, meeting or failing to meet. As they are assembled at different angles, they reveal, however slightly, a cubist preoccupation with shape. But De Chirico does not



aim at extracting a condensed pictorial vision from diversified objects, nor is he concerned with their essence. Enigmas take the place of cubist analogies in his universe, where space symbolizes the temptation of the unknown through the evocation of endless perspectives instead of concentrating and coördinating the known. In these "Metaphysical Interiors", which consist primarily of the usual paraphernalia of an artist's studio, such as easels, sketches and paintings at various stages of completion, figures also the eye itself. Its very presence might have determined Eluard to select an example from this particular series as most appropriate for his collection and most typical of De Chirico's art. An isolated eye, summarizing the intended exploration of a hidden world, constitutes a frequent and consequently significant element in surrealist literature and art. Only De Chirico depicts it in purely geometrical terms, as deprived not only of a field of vision but of organic and anatomical functions as well.

It is not only by insisting on a pure geometrical line which segments without bending that the artist creates an empty world apparently inappropriate to the evocation of our inner reality. One dares not pass the threshold of his windowless, forbidding buildings. Unlike Utrillo's Montmartre and Buffet's depopulated Paris, they can barely be located in space and time. Eternal in an almost legendary sense, they defy penetration in spite of open arches. They are, according to Mr. Soby, "detached from a near and present reality". Yet, by reminding us of several past epochs, they make us feel uneasy the moment we attempt to situate them in time. The presence of a modern engine adds a strange anachronistic note to timelessness. We face a well-ordered labyrinth if ever there was one, a trap uncomplicated by, and unrevealing of, any deep-rooted secrets. Is this the remnant of an old, undefinable disaster or rather the kingdom of the dead in the manner of Böcklin's famous isle? The inevitable silence of plaster statues, walls or pillars thrusts the weight of anguish on man's shoulders. Endless immobility lends frightening dimensions to the turmoil within us.

In spite of empty, unattainable spaces, of objects juxtaposed without aim or reason, of patternless geometrical accumulations, of dark abysmal gaps, De Chirico's universe cannot be termed inhuman. It bears the stamp of man's creation. Even when mechanical elements intrude, it does not reach the diabolical perfection of Picabia's machines endowed with self-penetrating power. Nor is man totally absent from the picture. He stands beside the monuments; insignificant by his stature, he is equally insignificant in relation to his gigantic and vigorous shadow, another indication that he belongs perhaps to the realm of the dead or the dreaming. In his "Self-Portrait", though he himself is not directly represented, his very being peers out through significant objects and symbolic attributes. Only two clumsy plaster feet which can barely be called a pair suggest man's physical presence. It is in his representation of the manikin that De Chirico comes closest to depicting man. This faceless, heavy, armor-clad, phantom-like creature, unable to move his limbs, seems condemned to a blind, passive existence. He is as much out of tune, step, and proportion with life as the small figures which occasionally stand beside the towers.

How could De Chirico inspire Paul Eluard, known as the poet of love, desire and intimacy, to write the following lines?

One wall betrays another's presence  
Whose shade protects me from my timorous shadow,  
O towering of my love around my love,  
Each wall spun whiteness around my silence  
  
And what would you protect? Pure, insensate Heaven,  
My tremulous shelter. Daylight protruding  
On a sky no longer the sun's mirror,  
Daystars amidst green foliage  
  
And memory of those who spoke unknowingly  
All masters of my weakness whose place I take,  
I who with love-filled eyes and hands so faithful,  
Could decimate a world where I am absent.

(Translation by J. D. Hubert)

The tone of the poem, compared to the painter's work which suggested it, sounds subjective and lyrical. The poet, speaking in his own name, is emotionally present; and words such as love, eyes, hands, suggest strong human relations. In the first stanza, the encounter between one wall and another, the silence, shadow and tower, constitute obvious elements of De Chirico's compositions. But Eluard does not merely enumerate details or reminiscences of paintings. Walls and shadows, evoking defenses and protection, surround an inner world which in its turn must erect its own walls and defenses. In the second stanza we again move from the outer world (the pure insensate sky so typical of De Chirico and directly invoked in the poem) to a realm where light is by no means a reflection of the sun. Penetration is achieved early in the poem by the drawing of parallels between the outer and the inner world, later by the abolition or at least obscuration of the tangible. The poet, therefore, ultimately confronts his own being for he can no longer rely on the distracting protection of a concrete world. Love and emotions, isolated from all contingencies, transcending the awareness of time past and time present, become overpowering in precisely the same manner as De Chirico's faceless and groundless creatures. Eluard's poem ends with a double negation or double statement of absence where solitude and desire are raised to absolutes and partake of the infinite.

Eluard has thus interpreted, but by no means betrayed, the Italian master's world, moving from representation to suggestion, from the wall to the void within, from inner perception to timeless silence. Although the painter implied by his precise but mysterious formulations the existence of a universal secret world, that of love and desire transcended by death, the poet, by a process of gradual elimination, represents love as the only vital gift, thus bringing De Chirico into his own universe, where love simply triumphs over death.

### *An Italian Painter in Paris*

Franco Cardinali's first one man show took place in Milan eight years ago. He then painted almost exclusively



human beings: humble Italian street-vendors and musicians. Stylization attenuated the realism of his subject matter. He sought to recreate the harmony of the human figure without relying on conventional concepts of beauty. His work of that period thus presents affinities with the portraits of Modigliani, the painter whom he most admires amongst the moderns. Cardinali also tried to capture the fundamental expression of each creature by simplifying to the utmost the outlines. In *Musicanti della strada* ("Street Musicians") he depicted two musicians' deep-rooted relation to their instruments by molding their bodies in harmony with the flute and the accordion, thus creating an analogy which endows the picture with warmth and a touch of humor. Limiting himself to two basic shades rather close on the scale theoretically dissonant, such as blue and green, brown and mauve, Cardinali succeeded in bringing out the characteristic suggestiveness of each tone while endowing the figures with a stone-like texture.

Soon the strong sculptural element disappeared. During the 1954-57 Vallauris-Paris period the painter relied less on perspective and his two-tone color scheme gained in radiance. In addition to portraits of concierges, street urchins, old "commères" of the Faubourg St. Denis, Cardinali painted still lifes composed of French kitchen or household utensils and produce sold on street carts or southern open-air markets. His people appear to be devoid of any particular expression and the utensils of any earthly use. Like Modigliani, Cardinali continued to stress simple unfragmented lines in order to delineate the human figure.

This affinity has now vanished. As the 1960 Paris show (consisting of twenty-six paintings completed in 1959-60) testifies, Cardinali's interpretations of the human figure might almost be regarded as anti-portraits. The radiant two-tone compositions of secondary colors still prevail. To olive green, chartreuse and turquoise, he has effectively added oranges and lilacs. Cardinali's recent paintings reveal strikingly new pictorial and literary dimensions. The subdued outlines of lone creatures have receded into the background,

if such terms as background and foreground can be applied to Cardinali's art which, in its own peculiar manner, is outspokenly figurative. His scenes definitely do not take place within a given frame or décor. Faint in outline, almost blended into their undefined surroundings, their glance turned upward, human beings become detached from any spatial context and to a certain degree ubiquitous. This distortion bears hardly any relation to Modigliani's upward sweep. Cardinali paints small weightless heads resting precariously on bodies growing massive and almost monumental in a downward direction. Their gigantic hands and feet seek to remain in contact with their earthbound life. Two canvasses show a man next to an empty cage with a bird, a luminous center, perched on his fingers. Whereas the man's oversized feet cling to the earth and his raised glance, his almost invisible forehead belong to another world, the bird suddenly becomes the focal point of this conflict incarnating at once separation and attachment, liberation and imprisonment, the present moment and timelessness. Thus these paintings attain a mystic quality not yet apparent in Cardinali's earlier work which, although stylized, bore the stamp of greater realism and concreteness. During the Milan period he created matter with his strokes whereas, with equally thick layers of paint, he now seeks to transcend it.

In a series of eleven paintings entitled *Germination fatidique* the artist represents a constellation of flowers, stems and leafage deeply rooted in a mysterious, immaterial soil. The irresistible upward thrust which submits at every moment to rhythm, harmony and discipline undoubtedly symbolizes creation. In Cardinali's universe where the relationship between human beings and the world, where the bare facts of existence are not taken for granted but in each case recreated, every floral element becomes a human promise.

## On Antonio Pace's Benjamin Franklin and Italy

MARIO MIRRI

[As a point of reference for a general consideration of historiography concerned with the *settecento*, Mario Mirri has singled out the recent volume of Antonio Pace, *Benjamin Franklin and Italy*, published by the American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia 1958). Mr. Mirri, who has published widely on Italian eighteenth-century history, was formerly assistant in modern history at the University of Pisa and now teaches history and philosophy at the Liceo Classico in Lucca.].

The years 1959 and 1960 have been dominated in the field of historical studies by the various centenary celebrations of the unification of Italy. There have already been (and there will be more) meetings of scholars to discuss problems concerning the emergence of Italy as a modern and secular state. The formation of this state marks the culmination of a movement which concluded with the territorial unification of the peninsula under the impetus of political forces which found inspiration in the ideals of nineteenth-century liberalism (though amid important and active democratic forces) and which expressed the requirements and necessities of a still weak but developing middle class.

These are themes which are historiographically of great interest, containing lessons and consequences that are still with us, if we well understand the limits of that liberal movement and of the political experience which followed, the contradictions within which the most heavily engaged political forces of the crucial period of the Risorgimento acted, and the consequences of weakness in the newly founded political organism which derived therefrom, to the point of perhaps explaining the "negative experiences," such



as fascism, which Italy was to undergo. This is a theme which has also been studied in the past few years by Denis Mack Smith, a young English scholar, who is much read and translated in Italy. His works, now in Italian (*Garibaldi e Cavour nel 1860*, Torino, Einaudi, 1958; *Storia d'Italia dal 1861 al 1958*, Bari, Laterza, 1959; *Garibaldi una vita in breve*, Milano, Lerici, 1959), although they have been the focus of a lively discussion and appear to be, the second in particular, somewhat schematic, demonstrate a notable capacity to approach the subject from within and with a sense of the problems quite close to Italian reality. From another point of view, the question concerning the political development of the Risorgimento and its consequences, can also be studied with the objective of understanding the relation between political process and economic conditions; in this case, it would be a matter of studying the conditions under which the phenomenon of the original accumulation of capital manifested itself. This too is an important theme both for judging the characteristics of economic development and industrialization, and for developing concepts and schemes of interpretation sufficiently valid for an analysis of decisive movements in the history of the Italian economy. Here too an interesting discussion is under way, provoked by a very polemical and certainly very acute book by the Italian scholar Rosario Romeo (*Risorgimento e capitalismo*, Bari, Laterza, 1959), who has criticized and overturned the Marxist theories of Antonio Gramsci and of those Italian scholars who are committed to these views—a discussion in which a scholar of Harvard University, Alexander Gerschenkron (“Rosario Romeo e l’acquisizione primitiva del capitale,” *Rivista storica italiana*, 1959, IV, pp. 557-586), has recently and authoritatively intervened. He is a scholar who had already studied problems of the history of the Italian economy (in the *Journal of Economic History*, December, 1955) and who now forcefully enters into a discussion now in process, showing not only great competence and accurate information, but above all an intimate sense of the problems involved.

Although discussions of the history of the Risorgimento are sure to multiply in this anniversary year, we should not neglect the fact that in Italy, as far back as 1945, but most of all in the last decade, interest in eighteenth-century history has been increasing; this interest is continuing to yield valuable results and we can foresee that even more important things will follow. If at first a tendency which placed in the foreground the necessity for understanding the economic history of the separate Italian regions (in a century that undoubtedly saw a revival and even a notable quickening of the means of production) seemed to prevail, in the past few years a tendency that has placed its emphasis on the history of ideas (or better, on the history of culture) in Italy in that century has taken its place next to the former. This second approach finds expression in a multiplicity of undertakings and researches which range from attempts to understand more adequately the way in which a more modern and realistic economic culture developed (above all as instrument of a reform policy adequate to the development of production or capable of favoring it) to analyses, at once more detailed and distributed along a wider scale, of individuals of the Enlightenment in Italy, of the more important tendencies which prevailed in the various intellectual circles of the peninsula and of the significance which these attitudes assumed with the moral and civic renewal of the country. In this direction is headed also the Istituto G. G. Feltrinelli, whose *Annali* are sufficiently indicative of the kind of research sponsored by the Sezione di studio per la storia dell'economia e delle dottrine economiche of this Institute and in which the problems of the Italian eighteenth century play a large part. But just as important, and perhaps at present richer in contributions and in initiative, is that tendency which works to illuminate, more and more intensely, the movement of ideas and the cultural orientation of the cultivated classes in Italy in the eighteenth century. Its most authoritative representative today is without doubt Franco Venturi of the University of Turin, not only because as an acute and informed scholar he continues to make definitive contributions in this field, but also because he happens to

be one of the more active promoters of research, towards which he is guiding several of his students. It is sufficient to point out, in reference to the developments shown by this tendency, the recent volume edited by Franco Venturi for Ricciardi, *Illuministi italiani, III: Riformatori lombardi, piemontesi e toscani* (Milano-Napoli, 1958) which clearly indicates the present state of scholarship in this area and allows us to see in what direction they should move and indeed are moving. Italian scholars, at any rate, now no longer approach research on the history of the eighteenth century with any preoccupation of finding in the period the premises or the origins of the Risorgimento (thus abandoning the point of view represented, typically, by Carlo Calcaterra's *Il nostro imminente Risorgimento*, Torino, 1935), holding that the events, the political tendencies, and the movement of ideas would be largely falsified and many phenomena would be neglected, were we to start out from that old point of view which we might call the "Risorgimentalist prejudice". According to this point of view, we cannot place the origins of that idealistic and political movement which led to the formation of the Italian state before 1789, when there came to the foreground, in relation to problems arising from the French Revolution, political concepts and a desire to act in directions that in the eighteenth century to a great extent could not have been conceived. A very well informed, but even more, a very intelligent scholar, professor of the history of the Risorgimento at the University of Turin, Walter Maturi, supported this line of thought even before World War II in his article on the Risorgimento in the *Enciclopedia italiana*, showing, among other things, the unacceptability of the thesis of "nostro imminente Risorgimento" concerning the cultural circles of Turin studied and reëvaluated by Calcaterra, and refuting at the same time all other theses that would seek the origins of the Risorgimento in the vicissitudes of the House of Savoy or in the development of Piedmont as a state tending to expand in Italy. These problems were later brought into focus, again by Walter Maturi, in the article on "Gli studi di storia moderna e contemporanea" in the



collection *Cinquant'anni di vita intellettuale italiana*, 1896-1946, *Scritti in onore di Benedetto Croce per il suo 80 anniversario* (ed. C. Antoni and R. Mattioli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli, 1950, vol. I; see particularly p. 241 ff., "Le origini del Risorgimento"). His view there expressed is now widely accepted by scholars. Thus, with a more mature and more reasoned point of view, we have returned to positions already widespread in Italian historiography of the nineteenth century, before the nationalistic trend became entrenched also in this field. We may note an historian who is today perhaps too much neglected: Augusto Franchetti, author of *Storia politica d'Italia dal 1789 al 1799* (Milano, Vallardi, n.d.), who discussed this problem interestingly in a series of articles published in *Nuova Antologia*, Firenze, 1889 and 1890 ("Della rivoluzione francese e della coscienza politica nazionale in Italia," vols. 104 and 105; "I governi d'Italia e la rivoluzione francese," vol. 108; "Dell'unità italiana nel 1799," vol. 110).

If in this manner we have achieved the result of making the historic events and processes of the *settecento* assume a more precise physiognomy and an indubitable autonomy, the problem then follows, for those who wish to do research principally on the history of culture and the intellectual movements of the period, of placing these phenomena in a truly eighteenth-century historical climate; that is, of studying them no longer for underlying nationalistic purposes (which are also implicit in the "Risorgimentalist prejudice") but within the compass of that European culture in whose debates the cultured Italian classes knowingly participated or to which they explicitly referred: thus the problem of the "circulation of ideas" was posed, as Franco Venturi appropriately said in a brilliant report to the Congress on the History of the Risorgimento in 1953. We can hardly do better than report his words. After having noted that the history of the Risorgimento cannot be studied as a political fact without taking the age of the French Revolution as a point of departure, he went on to analyze the more salient characteristics of Enlightenment culture and of the reform movement during the *settecento*, insisting on the necessity

of understanding them as parts of a broadly European movement: "Too often this 'reform' has been considered the ploughing of a field that was to be sown in the Risorgimento. Too often there have been discussions to discover whether the reforming spirit was imported or autonomous. As if the great force of the 'century of luminaries' did not lie in its very cosmopolitanism, which simplified words till they were understood throughout Europe, which created a common mentality in the literary republic, in many strata of the nobility and of the middle classes of the entire Continent, which developed a whole series of enterprises for the diffusion of new ideas, from Freemasonry to the Encyclopedia, which thus penetrated from Moscow to Madrid. The Italian states are a part of this Europe of luminaries (and of what else could they have been a part?); they are an aspect of it. Historically there exists no other problem other than that of defining the contributions of the particular centers of the Peninsula to the common world of luminaries, the bond that ties them now to this, now to that center of the European Enlightenment. The cosmopolitan Italy of the *settecento* knew how to live up to so high a level of civilization that it really does not deserve the historical error of a comparison with the national Italy of the nineteenth century. The only useful comparison we must make is a comparison with the other European centers of the same period." (Franco Venturi, "Rapporto al XXXII Congresso del Risorgimento," Firenze, 9-12 September 1953, "La circolazione delle idee," *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, April-September 1954, pp. 205-206).

This being the orientation of Italian historiography toward the *settecento*, we can understand with how vivid an interest any work that proposes to examine the relations of Benjamin Franklin to Italy would be read. The volume of Antonio Pace, who has gathered with so much attention and solicitude a vast number of documents to illuminate so interesting a chapter in international cultural relations, takes its place in a roster of studies already oriented to welcome with great sympathy all contributions in this field. The problem that chiefly interests Italian scholars is a more precise recon-

struction of the rapport between the American "scientist," "philosopher", and "statesman", and the intellectual circles of the Peninsula, for the purpose of understanding one of the more important periods of cultural life in the cosmopolitan Italy of the eighteenth century and defining another direction, among the many which characterized the European Enlightenment, in which groups of cultivated Italians moved.

So long as we deal with the history of the eighteenth century, there is no doubt that we can and must use, even in speaking of the "American" Franklin, the term "European Enlightenment." The formation, education, and culture of this typical eighteenth-century character have a matrix no different from that of the educated men of the old world; in general we can say that in that century the ideas and intellectual currents were the same on both sides of the Atlantic. Certainly, having once made this observation, we can also add that the Europeans transplanted to America found themselves, because of the way in which their relationship to the mother country developed, in a position of having to confront a political experience, and to attempt an application of the ideas of the Enlightenment which then had important repercussions on cultural movements of the old world and which contributed to acquaint many men of the Enlightenment with the possibility or necessity of developing chiefly the politico-constitutional strain implicit in the thought of the age. In this sense, the American Revolution, and Franklin himself, because of the position he assumed in the cultural and political debates of the period and because of what he symbolized in the eyes of his "brothers" of the old world, contributed to a definite turn of Enlightenment thought, or better, favored the forming and strengthening of a new orientation in many intellectual circles during the years 1770-1780: these are years of a certain ebbing, of a certain fatigue, in the face of difficulties encountered in the attempt to translate the demands of the Enlightenment into a formulated policy of reforms; the difficulty of following this road without first confronting the *political* problem, which many reformers had deluded themselves into believing could be left on a secondary plane, was gradually perceived.



The American experience, and Franklin's activity, helped, then, to bring to the foreground the problems concerning a constitution, a political organization of the state, the forms in which the rights of individuals were to be guaranteed and in which the needs and requirements of the peoples were to be expressed, at a time when this was felt to be the central problem by so great a portion of the cultivated classes of "old" Europe. If, then, Franklin is a typical personage of Europe of the Enlightenment, despite his individual character and influence, he cannot be studied outside the compass of that "circulation of ideas" which is characteristic of eighteenth-century European thought (in a Europe of which, from a cultural point of view, the English colonists transplanted to America are also a part); so that when we speak of an "historic American contribution to world civilization" (on the cover of Pace's volume) or, more acceptably, of the "cultural impact of America upon the rest of the world" (in the Preface), the word "America" can be used only in a conventional sense, as a geographic expression, in the same way that in speaking of Montesquieu we can use the word "France," or in speaking of Hume the word "England," or of Beccaria the word "Italy."

We are not able to say that, in preparing and in writing his book, Antonio Pace had in mind observations of this sort, nor that he proposed to consider problems such as those indicated above. His volume is more a collection of Italian testimonies on Benjamin Franklin, a wide and scrupulous documentation which, however, often remains a simple cataloguing and quoting of material not sufficiently elaborated from an historical point of view; indeed this material seems often to lend itself either to a simple apologia of Franklin or, scientifically more valid, to a presentation of a problem of the circulation of ideas: and this double possibility in itself indicates a certain lack of interpretation.

This opinion can be confirmed by an examination of his bibliography, which is, by the way, very rich; there is no doubt that the American scholar has read and consulted a remarkable number of Italian books and has found—this an indisputable merit—sources and material for his

work in the most varied and at times unexpected publications. Learned works which must indubitably be esteemed and used as such, do not, however, always adhere as well to a shrewd and well-informed knowledge of the problems. This phenomenon is especially typical of the tradition of Italian historical research, where under the influence of Croce we have witnessed the ascendancy of an historiographical trend which rightly attempted to pose first of all the "historical problem" and which accused the nineteenth-century historical school of being merely erudite, of gathering material "without an historical problem." Although Croce was himself enormously "erudite", this polemic has perhaps contributed to creating a gap between two equally essential moments in historical studies—the patient accumulation of material and the interpretation of it in the light of a problem, not "philosophical", but arising directly from the minute and unprejudiced analysis of the material itself—so that detailed research in Italy continues, almost as a reaction, to be cultivated in our century by scholars still confirmed in the necessity of grounding themselves essentially in the discovery and collection of documents, without perceiving that in this way they have not remained aloof from false problems but rather committed to a conception of the problems that have now been superseded. We have, however, the impression that Antonio Pace has absorbed too much from the literature he used, which could hardly fail to be made up of "erudite" publications, richer in facts to be used in such a work as this than those based on "problems." Indeed, he has not only drawn information and material from the consulted works, but also that old and superseded "problematic" that his sources unwittingly carried. It is interesting to note that Pace had no occasion to refer to any of the more significant Italian scholars or to any of those committed to a newer orientation. (I refer to those already mentioned in this article and to others who might be mentioned; but I would also add, simply to give examples somewhat at random, A. Omodeo, F. Chabod, A. Anzilotti, C. Morandi, G. Falco, and E. Sestan.)

On the other hand, and this was perhaps inevitable, Benjamin Franklin is presented in this book as a figure already defined and characterized, so that we can follow his influence on the culture or political orientation of Italian personages (*his* influence, or that of the European intellectual circles of which he was a part, or that referred to him, magnifying him and using him in their own politico-cultural battle?), but we cannot reciprocally trace the influence of European culture on Franklin nor see how it may have shaped his formation and his attitudes. This was perhaps inevitable, as I have said, and Mr. Pace need not have been reproached if he had always kept in mind, as an implicit frame of reference, not explicitly illustrated in this volume, the fact that Franklin was in turn an exponent of his time and part of it. But in many places Mr. Pace runs the risk of establishing a mechanical relationship between Franklin (his writings, his activities, his innovations) and specific developments of Italian culture, almost as if they were due only to Franklin and were not to be more broadly explained in terms of a more general movement in which the writings, the activity, or merely the figure of Franklin *also* participated as one of the elements, however much at a certain point he assumed *primary* importance. A statement such as: "Franklin's theory of electricity appeared very opportunely for Italian science. Beccaria's quick and thorough exploitation of it not only laid the foundations for the development of electrology in Italy, but provided an ideal arena for a decisive demonstration of the Galileo-Newtonian approach to nature" (p. 65)—is no doubt acceptable if it be understood that in Italy there was an important Galilean tradition and that in many circles scientists practiced and defended the experimental method (pp. 19-20.) Franklin's theories, then, were an important occasion for carrying on the battle in favor of this method, while Franklin himself gave it considerable aid.

An essentially correct presentation such as this should have been kept in mind in other instances, particularly in the chapters dedicated to the history of the nineteenth century which appear to be much more hurried and less acceptable

than the substantially good ones in which Franklin is considered within the compass of the intellectual movement of the *settecento*. Certainly the problem here was difficult to formulate. It was no longer a question of circulation of ideas and of reciprocal relationship between Franklin and Italian intellectual circles; it would have been necessary to consider the history of Italian culture in all its aspects and in all its currents, to see in this setting (if the subject can be of interest) how time after time the thought or even merely the myth of Franklin could be used by movements that had other origins and justified themselves on other and more precise European and Italian cultural bases.

Franklin the educator of the people (e.g., pp. 178-179) or the Franklin of the Almanacs (p. 265) or again Franklin the "popular philosopher" (p. 205 ff.) are topics which can no longer be studied from the point of view of Franklin's influence on Italian culture, but rather it would have been necessary to consider the history of popular education in Italy in the nineteenth century, and to have more knowledge of the tradition, since the eighteenth century, of almanacs in Italy. In this context (to be studied and analyzed autonomously) it would have been possible to place the figure, the myth, and the teaching of Franklin. It is indeed the very lack of a fully aware presentation of the sort that *can give the impression* that the great interest in popular education or in the diffusion of almanacs in Italy is due to Franklin, when instead it is only possible to satisfy curiosity in noting the presence of the name and the myth of Franklin (as with many other figures) in an Italian culture which independently faced its own problem of popular education or utilized its own tradition of almanacs for the people.

But aside from the presentation and the utility of this sort of research, in the pages here quoted, there are errors of evaluation which hardly reveal a profound acquaintance with Italian cultural history in the nineteenth century and which certainly show a less precise and certain knowledge than that demonstrated for the eighteenth century. This is not the place to underline every error of fact and particu-



arly of evaluation committed by the American scholar; but he might at least have kept in mind a volume such as that of D. Bertoni-Jovine, *Storia della scuola popolare in Italia* (Torino, Einaudi, 1954), which does not exclusively deal with the school problem but is also concerned with that of popular education more generally. Now we also have an instrument of research and information, truly successful in this field, *I periodici popolari del Risorgimento* (2 vols., Milano, Feltrinelli, 1959), with a fine introduction, again by D. Bertoni-Jovine, which can be consulted for a less superficial knowledge and for a correct presentation of this interesting period in the history of culture in nineteenth-century Italy.

More generally, considering chapters VIII to XIV of Mr. Pace's volume, we must say that a research subject having as theme the presence of Franklin in Italian culture from the beginning of the nineteenth century on, would have required a clearer view of the characteristics of political processes in this same period, and a greater capacity for the analysis and the distinction of the different movements and intellectual orientations that were developing in relation to them. Unfortunately, the American scholar appears instead to evaluate the political and cultural phenomena of the Risorgimento and of the Kingdom of Italy in a simplistic way, accepting some few traditional ideas on this period and remaining distant from a realistic and unprejudiced understanding. It was not by chance that we began by recalling other American scholars who had shown in their research on the same period of Italian history (notwithstanding the fact that their themes have been vividly discussed and even in part rejected) a notable capacity for analyzing and interpreting Italian documents and materials according to a viable and realistic "problematic," very close to the more profound and shrewder presentations of the historians of today, far from any too simple or conventional view. It is somewhat curious for the Italian reader to notice how in these chapters many of the principal names of personalities of nineteenth-century Italian life pass before our eyes as if flattened, losing those proportions which it is nevertheless

necessary to establish, as we cannot be satisfied merely by labeling them all liberals or patriots or combatants for the unity and independence of Italy. We could multiply the examples. How can one describe Compagnoni as "the Lombard journalist and historian" without mentioning the significance such a person had in Italian life and political culture at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century (see *Giacobini italiani*, vol. I, Bari, Laterza, 1956, ed. Delio Cantimori, and Cantimori's note to pp. 416-432 of this volume), rather than flattening him in comparison with a much less significant figure like Londonio (pp. 172-172). In reference to the theme specifically treated by Pace, he should here have consulted C. Morandi, "Giuseppe Compagnoni e la storia dell'America" (*Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, serie di lettere, storia e filosofia, Pisa, s. II, VIII, 1939, fasc. III, pp. 252-261), wherein it was noted that in this work "riappare Compagnoni giacobino e repubblicano del primo periodo napoleonico" (p. 261); he should also have referred to G. Procacci, "Rivoluzione americana e storiografia italiana" (Lecture read at the XXXII Congress of History of the Risorgimento, published in *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 1954, II-III, pp. 565-571), whose thesis on the great novelty of Compagnoni's *Storia dell'America* (having a clearly political content and emphasizing the democratic character of the American Revolution, thus being far from the views of Botta and Londonio) should at least have been discussed.

From this point of view, pages 169 and the following turn out to be wholly colorless. After having seen in a document of 1804 the attempt to present the American Revolution as "a complete paradigm of the Risorgimento" (!), Mr. Pace lists Cesare Correnti, Carlo Cattaneo, Vincenzo Gioberti and Carlo Botta one after the other (all as writers moved by a generic "Italian patriotic ideal"), when it should have seemed necessary to emphasize the profound differences, or better, contradictions, which existed among their respective political attitudes and cultural orientations, ripened as they were in an intellectual climate which would not in any case permit lumping Gioberti together with Cattaneo and Cor-

renti: we should instead remember that, while dwelling on the figure of Gioberti as the principal and more representative writer and "patriotic" politician is characteristic of the more conventional and nationalistic vision of the Risorgimento, in the past few years the need for analyzing better or in more detail the position of these "patriots" who, like Cattaneo, belonged rather to the democratic current (see F. Della Peruta, *I democratici e la rivoluzione, Dibattiti e contrasti politici all'indomani del 1848*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1958) has been felt more and more deeply. Not to mention Carlo Botta, whose formation took place in a preceding period as yet neither romantic nor nineteenth century. Instead of recurring to so general and disputable an expression as that used on page 170 (" . . . it exploited every opportunity to excite the nationalistic aspirations of the Italians and to suggest analogies with Italy's past and contemporary history") Mr. Pace might rather have discussed Croce's views borrowed from Dionisotti (*Storia della storiografia italiana*, Bari, Laterza, 1930, I pp. 77-79: "è una sorta di allegoria nella quale i rivoluzionari d'America stanno a rimprovero dei rivoluzionari di Francia e Washington a rimprovero di Napoleone, cotanto dal Botta aborrito"); this might have been, if naught else, an excellent occasion to define more precisely the true historical position of a "patriot," whose fundamental political experience remains that of the years of the French invasion and of the Napoleonic administration, in a revolutionary climate and in a period in which are posed perhaps for the first time in a well-defined form the problems of the "independence" and "unity" of Italy (as related to the politics of the Directory and of Napoleon), as can be seen, at least partially, in the interesting volume of G. Vaccarino, *I patrioti "anarchistes" e l'idea dell'unità italiana (1796-1799)* (Torino, Einaudi, 1955), which gives full prominence to the figure of Botta.

We may add yet another observation: that in the years following World War II another tendency in historical research to develop and gain strength is one which has stressed the importance of the political and cultural experience of Italy in the period from 1789 to 1815, in the

period, that is, of revolutionary and francophile "patriots", and later of "unitarians" and "independentists" or of "Jacobins." This is an orientation to which the already quoted D. Cantimori and G. Vaccarino belong, but which already has abundant and interesting contributions from A. Galante-Garrone and A. Saitta, E. Giuntella and R. De Felice (and here too we cite only the first names that come to mind); and this direction which discusses issues raised chiefly by so authoritative a scholar as D. Cantimori (authoritative above all as a scholar of sixteenth-century ideas, but no less acute and stimulating in this field) has also raised important problems which should in some way have been noticed.

But let us return to our subject. It may be that A. Tommasini has dwelt more at length than others on the figure of Franklin (p. 180 ff.); the fact remains that in Italian political and cultural history he was a secondary figure while Cattaneo, only mentioned in passing, was one of the more active and significant figures of nineteenth-century Italy. (See *Opere di Giandomenico Romagnosi, Carlo Cattaneo e Giuseppe Ferrai*, ed. Ernesto Sestan, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1957, where the introduction of Sestan, the best informed scholar in this field, with the most recent bibliography on the subject, can be found). Moreover, aside from the figure of Franklin, a rather interesting topic is that of the relation to be established between the federalist tendencies of this Lombard figure and his acquaintance with the American constitutional and political experience. (See, for example, Carlo Cattaneo, *Stati Uniti d'Italia*, Torino, Chiantore, 1945, with N. Bobbio's fine introduction; some reference to the important problem of the influence exercised by American experience on Italian nineteenth-century political thought, derived from Tocqueville's work, can be found in Sestan).

We could continue to point out certain errors in perspective, as, for example, Pace's neglecting to indicate the substantial differences between a Cantù and a De Sanctis, almost as though the different and much greater importance which the latter had in Italian culture were not noticed, but let this almost casual choice of examples suffice.



Far more solid and interesting are the chapters dedicated by Pace to the study of the different aspects of Italian culture in the *settecento*, even if here too at times is felt the unfortunate influence of Calcaterra, who on several occasions led Pace to accept the "Piedmontese" theory of the Risorgimento (e.g., p. 174). In his analysis of typically eighteenth-century phenomena he thus ends by accepting the old "risorgimentalist prejudice" instead of taking the point of view of the "circulation of ideas" (e.g. on p. 68, where he notes "a touch of chauvinism" in Italian evaluations of G. B. Beccaria, adding: "for this was the period in which the spirit of nationalism was beginning to form. It is as interesting as it is unexpected that Franklin should have contributed to the Risorgimento through the stimulation which his relations with Beccaria gave to Italian national pride [sic].") This is, generally, the tone of chapter eight).

The fact remains that the entire first section of Pace's book, up to chapter seven, constitutes an important contribution to the study of a significant period of eighteenth-century intellectual history: and this, first of all, because of his very scrupulous gathering of material, because of the wealth of facts which are put together, because of the extremely useful "Bibliography of Italian Frankliniana", because of the documents reproduced in the appendix, which constitute a necessary point of departure for any serious and well-founded historical work. In his interpretation of facts and documents, Pace sometimes falls prey to simplistic observations, as in the pages devoted to a very careful examination of Franklin's attempts to conclude pacts of friendship and trade with several Italian states (p. 110 ff.); these could be made the basis for an evaluation of the political tendencies and of the possibilities of these states for diplomatic action, whereas Pace avoids the problem and thus attributes too much importance to the phenomenon of pirates on the Mediterranean (p. 117), concluding with a very naïve statement: "It is perhaps not an idle speculation that early Italian-American diplomatic history might not have been quite so barren if circumstances had allowed the patriarch of Philadelphia to make a personal call in the peninsula"

(p. 119). Likewise, in speaking of Venice, it is not sufficient to call her "the sluggish Republic" (p. 114; here Marino Berengo's fine book, *La società veneta alla fine del '700*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1956, can be consulted). If perhaps the most important problem for a student of the eighteenth century is Franklin's contribution (and that of the American experience which he represented) to a turn in European and Italian Enlightenment thought, in the sense of convincing many educated people finally to place politico-constitutional questions in the foreground, the more interesting of Pace's pages are those in which he mentions all who saw in Franklin "a lawgiver" (e.g., p. 140 ff.) and the items scattered here and there concerning the different Italian translations of the political writings of the American "statesman" or his contribution to the distribution in Italy of the first constitutional texts of his country.

Also in this regard, chapter seven, "The Neapolitan circle", with all its information and discoveries concerning Filangieri (see the very fine letters reproduced in the Appendix) is one of the most stimulating and must be consulted from now on by anyone who wishes to study so representative a figure as the author of "Scienza della Legislazione;" but the arguments used to find a relationship between Filangieri and the new city Filadelfia in Calabria still seem rather weak, even if Pace's theory is perhaps acceptable. On the other hand, so numerous and interesting are the items on relations with Tuscany (from the several articles which the press of the Grand Duchy dedicated to Franklin and to the vicissitudes of American rebels, to the scientific interest so widely propagated in Pisa and Florence by Franklin's discoveries, to the very prompt installation of lightning rods, especially by Felice Fontana, to the publication of *Istoria del governo d'Inghilterra e delle sue colonie* by Vincenzo Martinelli, to his relations with, most importantly, Filippo Mazzei and with the Abbé Niccoli, to the sympathy of the Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo) that they alone constitute a fuller and at least as interesting ideal chapter, although the material is scattered here and there in the several eighteenth-century chapters of this volume. Well gathered and

interpreted, and weighed together with other considerations (let us think of the relations between Giovanni Fabbroni and Jefferson), this material could constitute the basis of an important work on the United States and Tuscany in the eighteenth century. Let me be allowed to mention in passing with reference to that interesting diplomatic figure, the Abbé Niccoli, that in an article dedicated to him ("Per una ricerca sui rapporti fra economisti e riformatori toscani: L'abate Niccoli a Parigi," in the *Annali* of the Istituto G. G. Feltrinelli, II, Milano, 1960), for which Pace's volume has also been very useful to me, I have been able to add a few details which permit the inclusion of Count Antonio Greppi and of the Count of Firmian among Franklin's Italian admirers and the inclusion of the famous Venetian nobleman and Mason Angelo Querini among those who wished to meet the American statesman in Paris (*ibid.*, pp. 89-93).

The problem of Freemasonry is one of the most interesting for the eighteenth-century scholar, and here too Pace offers us new items and valuable references, especially concerning the circle of Cremona, the printer Manini, Isidoro Bianchi and the Neapolitan group (pp. 139, 160-161, 189). Even the theme discussed in chapter ten (p. 205: "One suspects immediately a direct connection between the vogue of Franklin's moral writings and the development of the middle-class ethos in Italy") can perhaps be stimulating for Italian scholars, usually little sensitive to these problems, provided it be studied within the compass of a less conventional analysis of Italian cultural tendencies in the course of the nineteenth century. But it is especially the labor accomplished by the American scholar in characterizing the relations between Italian scientific milieux, with results so rich in new information, that is to be hailed with the greatest interest. He has, for example, justly observed that "Beccaria was in many aspects a typical *philosophe*" (p. 69). Generally speaking, it must be acknowledged that, while there is no doubt that in the culture of the eighteenth century and in its more vital developments there has always been a connection between the struggle for a more modern, secular, liberal thought and an interest in the progress of science and

in the application of the experimental method, it is also true that Italian scholars have not yet succeeded in directing their research on the "circulation of ideas" in such a way as to include the problem of the circulation of scientific ideas, of the diffusion of the experimental method, of the knowledge and application of all discoveries, in the most disparate fields, that would show the superiority of modern thought and its capacity to translate itself into practical knowledge that is immediately usable. This is a serious limitation; it is to be hoped that research such as Pace's may reawaken a more precise interest, not in individual practitioners of the history of science, but in scholars who might at least perceive that a problem in cultural history cannot be faced, especially when dealing with the Enlightenment, without also taking into account the history of scientific thought. Were Pace's book to contribute to this, we should be infinitely grateful to him.

More generally, this first attempt to analyze so significant a moment in the "circulation of ideas" in Italy, which ought to prove stimulating for Italian scholars, should be heartily welcomed. Notwithstanding the criticism that we have been moved to offer, this is the aspect to be emphasized. The American reader perhaps will excuse us if we have taken advantage of this occasion to dwell too lengthily on more general problems and to make a brief incursion (certainly somewhat confused and at all events anything but complete and exhaustive) into the field of Italian historical trends and of Italian bibliography on Italian history.



## Trends

### ITALIAN LITERARY PRIZES — 1960 EDITION

It is a well-known fact that the political scene in Italy, even at its best, is extremely complex. But the intricacies of political life seem limpidly clear when compared to the confused and confusing situation of the *premi letterari*, the literary prizes. After all, the political parties, numerous as they may be, can still be counted on the fingers of both hands. This is not the case with the literary prizes, which number well over one hundred—even if we should conservatively decide that only fifteen, or at the most twenty, out of this total are of importance. Moreover, the assignment of a prize is a much more complex task than the selection of a premier or a cabinet, if we are to judge by the factional pressures, behind-the-scenes agreements, politicking, and intrigue which go into such an operation.

The zealous and constant reader of newspapers and journals in Italy is quickly overwhelmed by the apparently inexhaustible supply of literary prizes. He finds that there are little ones and big ones; prizes for poetry, for essays, for literary criticism, for novels, for short stories, for scholarly works; for new writers, for women writers, for established writers, for retired writers—something for everyone and for every taste. Obviously, this superabundance of supply, in accordance with economic law, has caused a great decrease in the “price”; to put it flatly, literary prizes in Italy are too numerous to have real significance, and even the older and more esteemed ones have lost a great deal of their original prestige. But as the prestige has diminished, the worldly atmosphere and ceremonial which accompany the distribution of the prizes has increased. Equally great, in many cases, has been the increase in the monetary value of

the prizes, making them extremely desirable financially, if not for the sake of glory.

It used to be that a literary prize was an insignificant amount of money, a token payment, given to the prize-winner by a small group of older writers as a sign of esteem and encouragement. Today awards of millions of lire are supplied by industrialists, by bankers, or in many cases by local chambers of commerce or their equivalents, such as the local Enti del Turismo (Civic Tourist Agencies). The prize-giving ceremonies used to take place in some modest trattoria, in an unpretentious atmosphere of friendly camaraderie. Today the setting is usually a well-known resort town or spa, or a forgotten hamlet which has been "put on the map" by the literary prize and by the initiative of the local chamber of commerce. The atmosphere is anything but unpretentious. The excitement begins two or three days before the awards are to be distributed, when the jury begins to arrive. The judges are housed in the best hotel, if a choice is available, and they are solicitously and deferentially wined and dined. The tradition that associated a good dinner with the awarding of a literary prize has survived, indeed it has come into full bloom. Where there was once a single meal with the unmistakable flavor of home cooking, now there are several elaborate "pranzi" inspired by the latest inventions of an international cuisine. After the jury come the patrons of the arts, the sponsors, the rich dowagers with literary inclinations, the captains of industry who feel morally obliged to "support the arts," and a whole parade of assorted and solvent notables. This group is received even more deferentially than the jury, since they pay their own way and do not cost the town a single lira. Finally, the day before the awards are to be announced, the press arrives, adding to the excitement by busily rushing around photographing and interviewing all the possible winners. Of course the candidates have been there from the very beginning, sporting colossal indifference and intense nonchalance.

The day arrives. In the brightly lit and gaily decorated hall excitement reaches its height. The hum of conversation

becomes louder and louder, rendering the orchestra playing in the background hardly audible. Then silence falls as the award committee ascends the stage or the especially constructed platform. This committee, which is separate and distinct from the jury in most cases, is generally composed of the "local authorities," social luminaries, and cultural representatives, and of course it always includes one or more bedizened ladies in more or less low-cut gowns to add the feminine touch. The verdict of the jury is read, the prize or prizes are awarded amid the applause and acclaim of the public, and as the last "envelope" is put into the hands of the last winner the ceremony comes to an end, followed by the inevitable comments and criticism.

This description would not apply to all Italian literary prize-giving, but it is representative enough to serve as a model. Yet the important question is this: has the awarding of any of these prizes, whatever the procedure may be, achieved its original purpose? Has it bestowed, even if only for a fleeting moment, the laurel of fame upon the recipient? Has one young writer honored with one such prize been brought any closer to greater achievements or to the reading public? In the majority of cases the answer to all these questions would have to be no. Fortunately, of the more than one hundred prizes that clutter the literary scene in Italy, there are a few that fulfil a definitely beneficial purpose, and which at bottom seem to justify their own existence as well as that of the other prizes.

The oldest and still one of the most significant of all the literary prizes in Italy is the Premio Bagutta. Its history follows the classical pattern outlined above. In 1926 Riccardo Bacchelli "discovered" one of those old-fashioned trattorie that are the joy of Italian gourmets. Bacchelli, in addition to his literary fame, can boast of having discovered (with Giannotto Bastianelli) the now internationally famous Trattoria del Pappagallo of Bologna. After sampling the food at the little Tuscan inn several times Bacchelli revealed its existence to his friends, who became equally enthusiastic. The trattoria was situated in the Via Bagutta in the old section of Milan near the Monte Napoleone. The owner, a

certain Pepori, knew how to please the palates of the group, and the trattoria became the daily meeting-place, so much so that they ended up by christening themselves the Baguttiani. It was a sort of literary salon transferred to a trattoria. The food was excellent, the wine of the best, and the devotion to belles-lettres unquestionable. Orio Vergani was the member of the group who originally thought of establishing a literary prize. But it took him several months to convince the others—Bacchelli, Adolfo Franci, Mario Marchi, Ottavio Steffenini, Massimo del Curto, Mario Alessandrini, and Marino Parenti.

Once the decision was made an announcement was sent to the press, and the first award was set for January 14, 1928. The prize money was to be obtained from public donations and the writers named above were to be the only jury. The playful tone in which the affair was carried off aroused a great deal of suspicion that the whole thing might be a clever hoax. But the friends were in earnest, and on January 14 the first Bagutta Prize was awarded to G. B. Angioletti for his book *Il giorno del giudizio* (The Day of Judgment). Ever since then the prize has been awarded regularly, except during the war years. The jury has changed somewhat, many of the original members having died, but the spirit has remained the same; and even today the Bagutta Prize retains its initial prestige. Its choices have in general reflected good judgment and great independence of pressure groups. The prize itself is small, only 100,000 lire, but it is one of the most coveted awards because it brings professional as well as financial returns. The Premio Bagutta is the Milanese prize; and Milan accounts for roughly thirty per cent of the Italian reading public. Commercially speaking, recognition by the Bagutta jury in Milan is equivalent to selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club jury in the United States. In prestige the Bagutta Prize can be compared to the Goncourt Prize in France.

But even so respected an institution as the Premio Bagutta has been forced to make concessions to the changing times; the prizes have increased from one to five, and the ceremonial "pranzo" in the trattoria has become more nearly



a banquet. In 1960 the prizes went to Enrico Emanuelli for his novel *Uno di Nuova York* (A Man from New York), to Antonio Barolini for his book of poems *Elegie di Croton* (Croton Elegies), and to Mario Bonfantini for his first novel. Giovanna Zagrandi received the prize for a woman writer, and Bonaventura Tecchi the special "Bagutta d'argento-Verri." Bonfantini's and Zagrandi's works seem to have made very little impression; Tecchi's book is discussed below in connection with the Premio Bancarella; Barolini's poems have already been reviewed in these pages. Something remains to be said of Emanuelli's book. *Uno di Nuova York* could almost be described as a "whodunit" because of its plot; but it also poses the much more basic question of whether man is frustrated by life in the attempt to achieve his ideals or whether it is man who betrays himself. It is a well written work by a man who is a journalist by profession but will always remain a novelist by vocation.

In order of seniority the next prize is the Premio Viareggio, which actually includes as many as eight different prizes in several categories. This prize is *the* Italian literary prize. It is undoubtedly the best known to the general public and the most lucrative for the writers chosen, since the books selected by its jury sell very well. But this notoriety and economic advantage also have negative aspects; too often they tend to obscure the real intent of the founders. The prize was established in 1929 by a group of writers who spent their summers in Viareggio and established a sort of open-air literary academy right on the beach. The principal originator of the prize was, and still is, Leonida Répaci, one of the most picturesque and outspoken writers of modern Italy. The other founders were Alberto Colantuoni and Carlo Salsa. Undoubtedly they were inspired by the already-existing Bagutta Prize, but their aims were somewhat different. In the first place they wanted notoriety, in order to shake the Italian reading public out of its provincialism and apathy, hence they purposely chose a more sophisticated setting. Secondly, with Fascism already well in the saddle in Italy, they felt that they might provide an opportunity for intellectuals and writers to continue, even in a limited way,

to exchange opinions and ideas. Eventually all the founders were forced to resign from the jury because their political views were unacceptable to the regime. After the war, however, they returned, and the Premio Viareggio is once again Répaci's "creature."

The Viareggio jury takes into consideration all the novels, the books of poetry, and the essays which are published between the first of August of one year and the thirty-first of July of the following year. The "candidates" need not make any formal application or in any way express a desire to be considered; the selection and the final choice is the jury's sole responsibility. In actual fact, however, the publishers, if not the authors, of all books which might qualify for the prizes see to it that they are received by the permanent secretary of the jury. The funds for these prizes were originally furnished by the city of Viareggio. After the war, when the awards were resumed, serious financial difficulties arose, and the Premio Viareggio seemed condemned to extinction. It was Adriano Olivetti who, by donating several million lire, brought it back to life. Now that it again enjoys sound economic health the Olivetti funds have been withdrawn and the city of Viareggio has reassumed the financial obligation. The number and variety of prizes which are now given unquestionably represent a change in the original character of the award. Moreover, pressure from publishers, from commercial groups, from political parties, and even from the government, have made the Viareggio Prize an occasion for the most brilliant literary fireworks of the year. The social aspect has also become extremely involved and today the awarding ceremony resembles a cross between a debutantes' ball and an exhibition of haute-couture styles. The last Viareggio meeting was described by a journalist as: "una manifestazione culturale fra l'equivoco e l'agonia" (a cultural affair hovering betwixt misunderstanding and agony). Nevertheless, the jury has managed to retain some degree of independence, and the prizes are generally given objectively. The real trouble seems to be the cumbersome number of prizes that must be assigned. In their attempt to give something to everyone, and to satisfy

all concerned, the jury often produces an exactly opposite result.

In 1960 eight different Viareggio Prizes were distributed. The major prize went to G. B. Angioletti for his *Grandi ospiti* (Great Guests), a series of very brief and extremely sketchy essays on famous Europeans which the author had already published in magazines and newspapers. Angioletti is a well-known figure in Italian literary circles, respected and esteemed for his character and his charming personality, but one finds it extremely difficult to justify the selection of the jury. If it was meant as a token of appreciation and recognition of a whole lifetime spent in the service of literature, the choice was indeed a happy one; but the vehicle of a literary prize seems quite wrong for this purpose. The prize for the novel went to Laudomia Bonanni for *L'imputata* (The Accused). This work, which is deeply concerned with social problems, tells the story of an abandoned infant and attempts to establish responsibility for the many ills which continue to afflict the Italian South. The preoccupation with these matters dims the author's creative inspiration with the result that, artistically speaking, the book remains unconvincing. Other Viareggio prizes went to Paolo Volponi for poetry, to Eduardo De Filippo for drama, to Sergio Saviani for a first work, and to Silvo Micheli for journalism. There were still three more awards, all in the category of "saggistica." This term should mean "essays," but it is actually used much more loosely and extensively; it can cover anything from scholarly monographs to journalism. This year the prizes went to Umberto Barbaro for his Marxist interpretation of the cinema as an art form, to Ettore Lo Gatto for his monograph on Pushkin; and to Bruno Migliorini for his *Storia della lingua italiana* (History of the Italian Language). Both of these latter works are definitely of a scholarly nature and seem ill at ease in the company of the other Viareggio prizes, especially since there exists an award intended specifically for scholarly books, the Accademia dei Lincei Prize. The funds for this prize are provided by Antonio Feltrinelli, but the selection of the recipient is left strictly to the Academy itself, insuring an

impartial verdict on merit. The award for 1960 could not have been more objective and justifiable; it went to Mario Praz, for his works in philology, history, and literary criticism.

We come now to the Premio Strega, the "Roman" prize. It derives its name from the after-dinner liqueur, since the funds are provided by the Alberti family of Benevento, manufacturers thereof. But the award is popularly regarded as the "premio dei coniugi Bellonci" (Mr. and Mrs. Bellonci's prize). In fact, the idea of the prize was conceived in the literary salon they established in their house in 1947, in an attempt to revive literary activity after the war. The Albertis were close friends of the Belloncis, and they were easily persuaded to aid such a worthwhile undertaking. The locale for the Strega Prize is therefore Rome, its almost titular high priestess Mrs. Bellonci, and the atmosphere definitely high society. But the most unique feature of this prize is the mechanism by which the recipient is chosen. The Strega Prize has a jury or "sponsoring committee" of 361 members. Any book published within the year is eligible for the competition, provided it is endorsed by a signed statement from two members of the sponsoring committee. The author himself need not apply in any way, but he must approve the action of his two sponsors. In June a vote is taken among all the members and the hundreds of books originally entered are reduced to five works which then become the finalists. In July the members of the sponsoring committee gather for the occasion at the Ninfeo of Villa Giulia, and the final selection of one book is made. According to the founders, this procedure preserves their original intent which was not only to choose the best book of the year, but also to stimulate interest in the whole field of literary production, even at the cost of creating endless polemics and violent disputes. Indeed, they regard the latter as a necessary and desirable stimulant for the somewhat apathetic Italian reading public. In 1960 the selection was *La ragazza di Bube* by Carlo Cassola. (See *I.Q.* No. 15, Books.) The choice seemed to please almost everyone. Cassola was praised for his brevity and simplicity of style,



admirable qualities indeed, but carried by the author almost to extremes, with the result that the framework of the novel seems at times a mere outline. The sketchy characterization, the vagueness of the background, and the shallowness of the psychological analysis are not fully counterbalanced by the admirable style.

There is one notable exception to the sophisticated atmosphere which seems to go hand in hand with Italian literary prizes: the Bancarella Prize. The name itself could not be more plebeian and further removed from sophisticated society. "Bancarella" means "push-cart" or, somewhat more elegantly, "stand." Since time immemorial the traveling booksellers from Pontremoli, a little town in the part of northernmost Tuscany that juts into Liguria and Emilia, have controlled the book market in provincial Italy. From this town come hundreds of itinerant vendors; they stay clear of large or medium-sized cities, concentrating on the small towns and even isolated hamlets, and never missing such favorable opportunities as fairs, festivals of a patron saint, and other such occasions. The centers they visit very seldom boast a bookstore, so that the men from Pontremoli have little if any competition. Upon arrival they set up a *bancarella* in the main square or some other strategic position, and from there they tend to the intellectual needs of their public. According to the city booksellers, the only people who make any money selling books in Italy are those from Pontremoli. At any rate, they remain in one place so long as they can find customers, then move to the next town on their itinerary. When the idea of a literary prize first occurred, and to whom, seems now to be forgotten, but certainly whoever conceived it also discovered the simplest method of making a selection. There is no attempt to evaluate the book or to entrust the choice to a jury of experts; instead, that book is chosen which during the year has simply sold the greatest number of copies on the *bancarelle*. The commercial results of the Premio Bancarella are considerable, because the already achieved provincial success is followed inevitably by success in the cities. This year's choice was somewhat unexpected. The award went to Bonaventura

Tecchi's *Gli egoisti* (The Egotists). Tecchi has been a widely recognized writer for years, and although his novels have always found favor with the critics he had never enjoyed great popularity; his books had always sold modestly. This situation was drastically changed this year, and after obtaining the Bagutta d'argento-Verri and the Bancarella Prizes he has become one of the most widely read authors. *Gli egoisti*, like all of Tecchi's books, is solidly committed to a moral theme. The basic motif is the existence of evil and an attempt to explain its presence within the framework of an unshakable faith in God. The other and, so to speak, complementary motif which is also present in most of Tecchi's books is the concept of woman as the instrument which determines the fate of man for good or evil. *Gli egoisti* is at best a gloomy book, even if through its unbroken pessimism there occasionally appear glimpses of hope and the possibility of salvation.

The prizes which have been considered thus far are the most significant. The rest are legion and it would seem necessary to mention at least a few of them. The Premio Veillon is actually a Swiss prize but it is given for a novel written in Italian. In 1960 it went to Saverio Strati for *Tibi e Tascia*, a book which deals with the apparently insoluble problems of the Italian South as seen through the lives of the two protagonists, Tibi and Tascia. The Premio Pozzale went to Furio Monicelli for *Il Gesuita perfetto* (The Perfect Jesuit), the story of a novice in the society of Jesus. The Premio Prato was awarded to Leone Sbracca for *Giorni che sembrano anni* (Days That Seems Years), a diary of political imprisonment; to Beppe Fenoglio for *Primavera di bellezza* (Beautiful Springtime, a work whose title clearly indicated its political background, since it is a line from the Fascist hymn; and to Leonardo Sciascia for his excellent collection of short stories, *Gli zii di Sicilia* (The Uncles from Sicily). The Premio Puccini-Senigallia, reserved exclusively for short-story writers, was established by the city of Senigallia in memory of its beloved author Mario Puccini; in 1960 it was given to Renzo Rosso for his collection *L'adescamento* (The Enticement). The Premio Villa San

Giovanni was awarded to Virgilio Lilli for his novel *Una donna si allontana* (A Woman Withdraws). The Premio Buazzelli went to Giovanni Arpino for *La suora giovane* (The Young Nun), and to Carlo Bernari for *Amore amaro* (Bitter Love). The Premio Stradanova was given to Luigi Grande for an unpublished work, and finally the Premio Deledda went to Mario Cartasegna for *Un fiume per confine* (A River is the Boundary).

The above list, to be sure, undoubtedly contains some unforgivable omissions; nevertheless it seems representative of the general situation. Nothing has yet been said of the prizes reserved exclusively for poetry; they should now be considered separately. The number of people in Italy who compose poetry, at least by North American standards, is really amazing. How many of these people really deserve the name of poet, probably only time could tell, but it is encouraging and satisfying to see the zeal and intensity with which the cult of poetry survives. Certainly the true poets among contemporary writers of poetry are few, but the sheer number of writers and the intense competition seem to insure very high standards. Perhaps it was this prevailing high but still "average" standard that led the jury of the Premio Chianciano to come out with its unexpected verdict. The Chianciano, the Premio Cittadella, the Premio Cervia, and the Premio Firenze are the significant poetry awards. For 1960, however, the Chianciano jury gave *no* award, claiming that Italy produced no poetry worthy of the name in that year. This statement was received with satisfaction by a few who felt that it might have the salutary effect of reducing the number of poetasters, but in general the reaction was very unfavorable. There were cries of "politics" and "shame." The focus of attention seemed to be Giuseppe Ravegnani around whom a violent polemic arose. The choice of Ravegnani by the Chianciano jury had been rumored as certain days before the selection was to be announced. Then at the last minute something happened. The "Roman" faction of the jury, supposedly determined to prevent the selection of Ravegnani's book for reasons of personal antagonism, prevailed on the rest of the jurors, and since no com-

promise candidate could be found they decided not to make an award. The judges have naturally denied all this and reaffirmed their belief that no real poetry was written in 1960. This opinion was not held by the jury of the other important poetry prize, the Premio Cittadella. This prize (named after the small town in the province of Padua which awards it) was established by Rino Rebellato, an elementary school teacher, sometime editor, and fine organizer, who had the wisdom to form a practically incorruptible jury including such critics as Carlo Bo and Diego Valeri, thus insuring great prestige for his prize. In 1960 the Cittadella Prize went to Luciano Erba.

Informed readers may ask: What about the Premio Marzotto, isn't it one of the important prizes? Yes, the prize for the novel is important, the one for the theatre is not. It is a long and complicated story which will have to be one of our unforgivable omissions. But after even this cursory view of the situation one question comes naturally to mind. Are literary prizes as they exist in Italy today a positive or a negative factor in the world of letters? Those who would say negative maintain that the very number of the prizes reduces their value; that the resulting confusion is distinctly harmful; that the writer is placed in the position of a beggar asking alms of a society that neither understands nor appreciates him; and that the glory derived from these prizes resembles the love of a streetwalker who gives herself to everyone and belongs to no one. Those who would say that the prizes are a positive factor seem to have equally plausible arguments on their side. They claim that confusion is better than stagnation; that the meretricious favors of a streetwalker are preferable to sterile chastity and desolate obsessions; that bad prizes are better than no prizes at all; that this is the only way for the public to hear the voices of new writers; and that the prizes tend to break the harmful monopoly of a handful of critics who set themselves up as arbiters of public taste. Right and wrong seem to be equally divided.

Perhaps we ought to leave the last word to Leonida Répaci, founder of the Premio Viareggio and one of the



strongest supporters of literary prizes, who nevertheless has this to say: "The Premio Viareggio has done me untold harm. I owe to this institution a yearly crop of hundreds of disappointed writers who, if they could, would pull my eyes out with their fingernails. At least one would expect that those who succeed, the recipients of the prizes, would bear us a little affection and loyalty. Nothing of the kind. We are building on sand. Every year when the awarding ceremony is over the months of venom begin. Everyone seems to descend in wrath upon me: the disappointed losers, their friends, their relatives, their followers. It is just as if we had murdered their aged mothers. This last year [1959] the turmoil reached unforeseen proportions. How can we stand against the attacks of these *teddy boys* of the organized critics? . . . It is a desperate struggle!"<sup>1</sup>

1. From *Ritratti su misura* by F. Accrocca, Venice, Sodalizio del libro, 1960, p. 361.

## Books

### PIRANDELLO AND THE FRENCH THEATER

Every book should begin with some initial flash of attraction or repulsion for a particular issue or work or writer and then grow like a magnetic field around that impulse. One difficulty with Thomas Bishop's *Pirandello and the French Theater* (New York University Press, 1960) is our inability to locate that impulse, although it may be simply a broad and sympathetic interest in modern French theater. Yet obviously Mr. Bishop has attempted to do more than merely report on some French plays of the last forty years. He approaches the French theater through a particular case of "influence," indeed a crucial case, yet he has not provided a structure in terms of which that influence can be satisfactorily explained, if it can. The first forty-seven pages of the book provide a useful account of Pirandellian themes as they appear in the major plays; the remainder of the book is devoted to rather brief sketches of French plays in which similar themes appear between the 1920s and the present. These analyses are quite helpful if one has not read the plays, as in some cases I had not; yet there seems to me to be a flaw in the way in which they are conceived and expressed.

Mr. Bishop repeatedly characterizes Pirandello's thought and art in terms such as the following: "his plays brought new ideas to the stage and he increased the dimensions of the stage itself, *skillfully interweaving the artificial level of the theater with the reality of life*;" "we are in the presence of a true theater of ideas wherein *the author's views of life and art blend now more, now less, successfully with the demands of the stage*;" "*The confusion between reality and illusion* stems directly from the multiple facets of Enrico's personality." (italics mine). Such formulations do an injustice to the basic idealism of Pirandello's thought, to its seamless and undimensional drive toward a vision of art and life as one truth of the mind and spirit. To speak of "blending" or "interweaving" or even "confusion between reality and illusion" is a misreading of Pirandello and the whole tradition of modern idealism to which he belongs. The stage is no more artificial than life—this would surely seem to be one of the major points of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. Art may reveal a profound truth while life may be a lie; and life may be lived as artifice while a stage action may be lived intensely by the actors, as in *Questa sera*

*si recita a soggetto*. Mr. Bishop says, in regard to this play, that "once again, the playwright is blocked in his attempt to reconcile art and life." But the point should be made rather that, in the false play-within-a-play, the improvisation, art and life cannot be reconciled; but Pirandello's play *does* reconcile them, by proving that they are the same thing. For the idealist, "reality" is what we see; "confusion" occurs when what is seen is seen differently. And it is always seen differently, since Pirandello's idealism denies not only the structure of the outer world but that of the personality as well. The anguish of his characters, seeking constantly to construct themselves at the same time that they are constantly discovering their gratuitousness, their emptiness, suggests a resemblance between Pirandello and the French writers of the absurd, as Mr. Bishop points out in his last chapter. Yet he does not make the important connection between a theater of the absurd and the philosophical idealism to which it is intimately linked (although Pirandello's sojourn in Germany should have been a clue). It is precisely Pirandello's position as a precursor of the idealistic theater that explains his "influence."

Mr. Bishop is forced to state repeatedly that the French plays he discusses are only slightly Pirandellian, Pirandellian in one aspect and not in another. Even the helpful quotations from letters written to him by the playwrights in question stating that they were or were not influenced by Pirandello are unconvincing. They are unconvincing precisely because Mr. Bishop's only technique for proving influence is to analyze themes. Achard's *Domino* resembles Pirandello's *Il Piacere dell'onestà* in its theme of truth produced by the lie; Giraudoux's *Intermezzo* presents a Pirandellian need for illusion; the theme of masks in Camu's *Caligula* is Pirandellian; multiplicity of personality in Genêt's *Les Bonnes* is a common Pirandellian theme; etc. But a mere juxtaposition of themes leaves our most pressing questions unanswered. Out of what historical and cultural necessities does this theater emerge? Are there not profound differences in tone among these authors? What of Pirandello's humor? And most important, what specifically artistic strategy is developed by Pirandello? Is this strategy exported to the French stage?

It seems to me that Pirandello's plays are tragic precisely because they are so resolutely cast in the naturalistic mode; that is, a theatrical convention which assumes the prime "reality" of the "outside world," the world of money, family obligations and human relations. It is out of this world that we construct ourselves and its violence, its inadequacy, its lies doom all our attempts at transcendence. These plays turn on domestic conflicts or incest or obsessional violence in bourgeois settings; the very theatrical convention assumed by the plays dooms the characters to failure. The esthetic strategy here is the ways in which Pirandello brings these

two urgencies together and, through the manipulation of action and point of view, strives to wrest some kind of transient or partial victory from the brute facts of a naturalistically conceived environment. Failure is inherent at the outset; the result is a heightening of tension together with a certain loss in expressiveness. Pirandello leaves us with doubts, with questions, with uncertainties—unlike Proust, for instance, who pursues the same mysteries considerably further. One might repeat here that remark of Giraudoux's to which Sartre has objected: How we say a thing (in this case, the choice of the naturalistic convention) is infinitely more important than what we say.

A study so resolutely thematic as that of Mr. Bishop cannot deal adequately with the technical strategies which Pirandello adopted not by some quixotic turn of personality but by the conflict between his vision of man and his conception of the stage.

This is an honest and well-written book, yet one whose scope is more ambitious than its author seems to have realized. (Or am I guilty here of the same kind of brash second-guessing I find Mr. Bishop guilty of when he writes: "It is a pity that Bernstein did not remain under the influence of Pirandello longer." Or again: "His plays [those of Denys Amiel] . . . have enjoyed fleeting popularity, but one feels that he . . . could have written more lasting drama.") At any rate, the book fails to provide that discussion of Pirandello's idealism or of his dramaturgy that might have served as an adequate basis for the study of one of criticism's most elusive concepts, influence. Without adequate critical underpinnings Mr. Bishop's literary sensitivity and love for the stage are not adequate to the task he has undertaken.

[Neal Oxenhandler]

## MORAVIAN MODULATIONS

*La noia*, by Alberto Moravia, which is to appear in English as *The Empty Canvas*, was published in the summer of 1960 and promises to remain as the outstanding fictional success in Italy even through 1961. The novel is narrated in the first person, and the narrator-hero is in many ways a standard Moravia character: the Unhappy Lover, sensual and introspective, subjected by the very exercise of his love to some sort of profound frustration. Moravia has abandoned, I don't know whether temporarily or permanently, the narrative speech of the heroes of his *Roman Tales*—the semi-vernacular *pastiche*—in favor of a voice which enables him fully to make use of his own linguistic equipment and descriptive subtlety; the hero is at the same time protagonist and *raisonneur*. In statements made when the novel came out, for instance in the



weekly *L'Espresso* of which he is the film critic, and in the Roman *Paese-Sera* (the only daily in Italy that publishes a weekly literary supplement), Moravia upheld the notion that fiction can now be written only in the first person; he declared that since any vision of reality can now be only individual and fragmentary, the all-perceiving anonymous narrator is unthinkable. On the whole I find such statements not worth quibbling about (the author, in one way or another, is *there* all the time, whether he narrates or not); but they are interesting in so far as they throw light on the methods of a novelist of Moravia's stature. In other words, it is significant that at this juncture Moravia should have felt like relinquishing the elementary heroes of his Roman Tales as his fictional mouth-pieces in favor of the articulate, sensitive, indeed quite neurotic *persona* of the idle artist who is the new novel's protagonist. It is too early to tell whether this marks the beginning of the end of the vernacular vogue in Italy (a recent trend not limited, of course, to Moravia alone); at any rate, the feeling of limitation in the keyboard and almost of a kind of falsetto in the narrative voice, which we could not help deriving from the Roman Tales, is now gone, in favor of a more inclusive and serviceable tonal range. Besides, the nature of the hero permits the author to make use of an explanatory essay-like manner which an anonymous teller of the tale, however omniscient, could not easily have allowed himself. This, of course, is always one of the advantages of an "identified" narrator: what could have been an obtrusively critical manner becomes characterization-through-speech.

Thus, from the moment the novel opens, the hero is given a chance to define himself, psychologically and socially. His main trait, and the novel's announced theme, is a permanent feeling of *noia*. "Boredom" hardly covers the case. Nor is this "spleen" or any of the old varieties of ennui. Italian newspaper critics, rather predictably, have given it a fashionable though blurred new tag: this is a case of *noia esistenzialista*. Curiously enough it has reminded me of that state of Horror which Auden has expressed in the first of the "Narrator" passages in *For the Time Being*:

I mean

That the world of space where events re-occur is still there,  
Only now it's no longer real; the real one is nowhere  
Where time never moves and nothing can ever happen . . .

The hero himself, in *La noia*, offers convenient definitions of his own brand of *noia* from the very start, for instance on page 6: "At this point I believe it will perhaps be opportune that I expend a few words on the subject of *noia*, a feeling about which I shall frequently happen to talk in these pages. Well, however far my memory may push back through the years, I always remember

having suffered from *noia*. But we must be clear on this word. For many, *noia* is the opposite of amusement (*divertimento*) . . . for me, it is actually a kind of insufficiency or inadequacy or scarcity of reality . . . My *noia* could be defined as a disease in objects, an almost sudden withering or loss of vitality, like seeing in a few seconds, by very rapid successive transformations, a beautiful flower pass from blossoming to wilting and to dust." Or, to see the phenomenon the other way round, the hero's basic attitude is his incapacity to come to grips with, and somewhat to possess, reality, to achieve a fulfilling experience in his relation to objects and people. He is a painter, and his psychological blankness is easily symbolized by the empty canvas; in fact, the book's opening statement is about his having ceased to paint.

The major image of his incapacity, however, is the novel's heroine and his relationship to her. Cecilia, who had been the model and mistress of an elderly painter of vulgarly old-fashioned qualities, after the older man's death becomes involved with the hero who has left his mother's villa on one of the fashionable ancient Roman roads to live in the artists' quarter on the via Margutta. An Italian critic of Moravia's book, Carlo Bo, has very superficially defined Cecilia "a domestic Lolita," *una Lolita casalinga*. Whether comparable to Lolita or not, Cecilia, who is seventeen, is the most vital force in the book; without this element, the novel would largely be the first-person case history of a neurosis. The dialogue between Cecilia and the hero is often reduced to the stylized brevity of an *agon*, and generally the relationship between the two manages to be one of the most successful recent variations on the theme of incommunicability in "modern love". The descriptions of physical love are numerous; some critics, surprisingly among them Enrico Falqui, have been repelled by their alleged crudeness. Actually, their very monotony is functional to the story; the recurrence of the same mechanical gestures, with frenzy followed by frustration and void, is part of the book's very theme. Whatever plot there is centers on the hero's distorted jealousy and his desire to find out about Cecilia's suspected relationship with an actor; at one point the hero enlists the services of a detective agency. During the search for evidence, in the realistic, yet somehow visionary rendering of Roman backgrounds and situations (Cecilia's shabby apartment and family; the hero's long hallucinatory watch at the small café in front of the actor's house; his own mother's rich and vulgar Via Appia habitat) Moravia achieves the highest points of his consummate narrative skill. In some ways this book is a summary of several of his manners, from the early pictures of Roman upper-class decay to the late excursions into the *popolaresco* element in his city and even to the "surrealistic" manner of some of his stories of ten or twenty years ago: a touch of this last can be detected in the scene where the hero, hav-

ing absurdly taken Cecilia to one of his mother's cocktail parties, retires with her to an upper floor and covers her with money taken from his mother's safe — a performance which is compared to a painting, hanging in the house, of Danaë under her rain of gold. The mature writer somehow manipulates everything and makes it acceptable; through thick and thin, as it were, he remains intensely legible. The essay-like manner, as I have said, is always justified in terms of the hero's speech; so that the author can explain his story without losing the concreteness of rendered experience, and without becoming hopelessly dull. Here is a clear example (p. 239): "The curtain of the large window was lowered; a restful light, yellow and warm, filled the studio. I stretched out on the sofa and lying on one side I started looking at the white canvas still on its easel near the large window. I thought that the canvas was empty because I could not manage to take possession of any reality at all, in the same way that my mind was empty in regard to Cecilia who was escaping me and whom I could not possess. And the physical relationship with which I often gave myself the illusion of possessing Cecilia, corresponded to the pornographic painting of Balestrieri [the older dead painter], that is to say, it was not possession, in the same way that Balestrieri's was not painting. And in the same way as, with Cecilia, I oscillated between *noia* and sexual mania, so in art I oscillated between bad painting and no painting. And now I had turned to the Falco detective agency to know something certain about Cecilia; but it was as if, in order to paint, I had read a scientific treatise on the nature and composition of matter . . ."

As is the case with much of Svevo (the earlier master in the handling of self-analyzing heroes) this is also a novel about senility, intended as the phase of experience in which life, and especially the life of the senses, has lost its lustre. Cecilia makes love as she would eat bread, with indiscriminate and unquestioning satisfaction; to the hero this is bound to be a mystery, a major source of puzzlement and despair. The situation may not sound terribly new as we try to state it abstractly; Moravia's version, at its best, has the unmistakable sound of new psychological ground being broken. The conclusion is on a note of serenity: after driving the hero insane (the culmination of this is a mad automobile ride which may or may not be interpreted as an attempt at suicide). Cecilia in the end becomes also an image of relative hopefulness, the possibility and concreteness of reality outside of oneself: ". . . I did not want to possess her any more, but to look at her as she lived . . . Actually, as I realized of a sudden and almost with wonder, I had renounced Cecilia for ever; and the strange thing was that through this renunciation she had started to exist for me . . . I realized I loved her still, but with a new and different love. This love could or could not be accompanied by physical contact,

but was not dependent on it, and in a way, did not need it." So the story suggests in the end what I suppose all successful stories should—a widening of experience, the reaching of a higher though by no means safe or definitive plateau.

However, I believe that its appeal to a wide audience does not so much depend on its conclusion as on the analysis that precedes it. As was the case with the moral theme of "indifference" in his first novel of over thirty years ago, so now with the theme of *noia* Moravia has struck an authentically responsive cord, has performed that operation, somewhere between recording and inventing, which is the novelist's function in society. This, rather than the attraction of supposedly saucy passages, or the unquestioned promoting ability of his publisher Bompiani, is the main reason why sixty thousand people bought his novel in the first few months after publication.

[P. M. P.]

## TIMES IN ROME

In the title of Aubrey Menen's new book, *Rome for Ourselves* (McGraw Hill, 1960), there is implicit the assumption that each of us builds his own Rome out of the ruins: it's all in how we look at them. Menen's own look is sharp:

The ruins of Rome . . . can be a trap for the unwary . . . There is, for instance, a famous view of the Forum from the Capitoline Hill. There is a prospect of ruins and columns, set off in the foreground by the Temple of Saturn, one of the most celebrated and the most complete of all the monuments. Generations of visitors, whose aesthetic sensibilities have been stirred up by the thought of Rome, have gazed at this view and drunk in its architectural beauties. I do not say it is not beautiful. But I would like to point out that some of the columns of the Temple of Saturn are upside-down.

On the other hand, Elizabeth Bowen, in *A Time in Rome* (Knopf, 1960), sees the Forum in a much softer focus. For the Romantics in Rome, she writes, "over everything shimmered illusion's veil," and for her as well these ruins are constantly restoring themselves. For her (as for most of us) these stones never cease to sermonize or to invite speculation: "there is eloquence in this extended dazzle of unearthed stone." She is stirred to wonder rather than to scrutinize:

My approach to the Forum was visual rather than historic—even though "seeing," the greater part of the time, had



to be an act of the mind's eye (or better, that of directed imagination). To recreate, even for an instant, what is laid low, dishevelled, or altogether gone into thin air is exciting. What is totally vanished raises peculiar questions—out of a number of haughty buildings reduced to the equalitarianism of being nothing, to which is one to give precedence, in recalling them?

As one can gather from his comment on the Temple of Saturn, Menen is inclined to be iconoclastic in his treatment of the Eternal City. He gives his reader fair warning at the outset: "to be a Christian is a matter of faith. I have found that to be especially so when I study its history. Therefore, I do not recommend this book to pilgrims." Pilgrims to the Forum, he means, as well as to St. Peter's, for he proceeds to cast his cold eye on the history of Rome from Romulus to the New Rome which he centers around Nino, a thirteen-year-old boy of poor but proud family. Significantly enough, here in the last chapter the cold eye grows tender: Romulus is fake but Nino is real. In fact, the whole book seems written to explain just what Menen sees in this child, why he makes friends with him. The lesson is simple enough: since less than half of history is true, it is absurdly sentimental to do it reverence, to seek the grandeur that was Rome (*O nouveau venu qui cherche Rome en Rome*), to walk through Rome as through Pompeii, blind to its true grandeur, the life of the city now, a city, Menen claims, dominated not by the Caesars or the Pontiff, but by Henry Ford (who also dismissed history as bunk.)

Menen's very title contains his point: Rome is for ourselves to live in, not for the shades, the ghosts of the past which he chases away. For Miss Bowen, on the contrary, Rome is a haunted city. Here, for instance, is the close of her chapter on "the new Roman Empire's First Lady," Livia, the wife of Augustus:

Livia seems very contemporary, seated here in the villa, by a window . . . Window-gazing along the Via Condotti, I see her in the subtle profusion behind the plate-glass, in the enchantedness lent to luxury, in the intricacy of tiny boxes and large necklaces, in the musically carven jades, crystals, corals, ivories, in the cobwebs of lace no less than the sharp-cut rays from jewelers' cushions, in the sheer *look* of scentedness. Ensnare Rome must: it has an aspect—this—which I find myself calling "the smile of Livia."

Again in contrast to Menen, Miss Bowen in her self-guided tours of the city steers herself clear of the modern Romans: "at the risk of seeming unsociable, which I am, I admit I love to be left in a beatific trance, when I am in one." It is, of course, partly a mere question of time: Miss Bowen is a tourist with only a time in

Rome (she can move faster and see more alone), whereas Menen is a resident. But it is, in larger part, a question of attitude toward Rome past and present. Menen has chosen to live in Rome, to make a home himself, and, having dismissed the claims made on his attention by the false specters of the past, he seeks out the live Romans and does as they do now. Miss Bowen, on the other hand, comes to Rome to muse for a time on what they once did.

Miss Bowen invests, Menen divests. Thus, while Menen is stripping the togas off the ancient Romans, or, to use a current term exposing their "image" of themselves as pious and sober, grave senators all, Miss Bowen is busy redecorating the exquisite Livia's villa, seeing it as perhaps something like Joséphine's charming Malmaison *avant la lettre*. While Menen dismisses as "bunkum" the claim that the dome of St. Peter's is Michelangelo's masterpiece, Miss Bowen speaks of "the adorable Villa Farnesina." While Menen is exposing the Donation of Constantine as a fraud (he can't resist beating this dead horse), Miss Bowen is imagining what it would be like to be a Vestal Virgin. She leaves Rome like Katherine Hepburn leaving Rossano Brazzi (as the blurb puts it, her book is "a story of an encounter that becomes, in its poetic way, a love story"):

Only from the train as it moved out did I look at Rome.  
Backs of houses I had not ever seen before wavered into  
mists, stinging my eyes. My darling, my darling, my  
darling.

Menen tells us, in his last words, that he will probably leave Rome for Ostia, since that's where the Romans are going in this age of Ford (not, of course, Ostia Antica, but rather the jazzy resort—the *leitmotif* of his last chapter on the new Rome is a juke box tune).

For myself, I found both books enjoyable and enlightening in their different ways. Many readers, I can well imagine, may be irritated by the mannerism of Miss Bowen's mandarin style, by her fastidious stepping among stones, and others may object to Menen's debunking and his journalistic prose. His style contrasts strangely with his sumptuously produced book. For instance, his caption on the reproduction of the near nude statue of Paolina Borghese is certainly aimed at the lowest common reader:

When she was asked how she, a lady, could pose naked for an artist, she replied, "Ma la stanza era ben riscaldata" (that is to say, "But the room was well warmed"), a phrase echoed in our own times by another celebrated woman, Miss Marilyn Monroe, who said that she had the central heating on. There is nothing new under the sun.

Such a comment represents the furthest remove from the refinement of Miss Bowen's taste. The taste of the reader might well reject one

in favor of the other approach to the city, but the city, of course, will survive both.

[E. F. Mengel]

## A NEW BOOK ON GIOTTO

Millard Meiss' new book, *Giotto and Assisi* (New York University Press, 1960) is the printing of a lecture he gave two years ago at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University. It was delivered in connection with a momentous event in the history of the Institute, namely the dedication of its new quarters in the James B. Duke House. Meiss' paper marked also the first annual Alumni lecture in honor of Walter W. S. Cook, Chairman Emeritus of the Institute, who is primarily responsible for bringing the Institute to its outstanding position as one of the great centers of art historical research and teaching in this country. And by selecting as his topic "Giotto and Assisi" Professor Meiss pays tribute to Richard Offner from the faculty of the Institute who for decades has done fundamental work in Dugento and Trecento painting.

Thanks to the place and the audience for this lecture, Professor Meiss' discussion is highly professional and technical. Only the specialist can follow it. And even he has to be extremely alert because the author manages to press an extraordinary amount of new observations and insights into the 25 pages of text. The understanding of his argument, however, is helped in an exemplary way by a supplement of 75 reproductions which, small as the book is, should make it a model for university press publications in the field.

As the author himself admits, he is not offering a new solution to the problem of Giotto's work in the church of St. Francis at Assisi. As a matter of fact, his final sentence repeats verbatim the position taken by Robert Oertel (*Die Frühzeit der italienischen Malerei*, Stuttgart, 1953) which identifies the so-called Isaac Master with Giotto. His contributions, and they are many, lie rather in other areas. Unassailable evidences are provided for a more precise dating of the St. Francis Legend in the Upper Church as well as for the frescoes in the Orsini Chapel in the Lower Church. The author does not consider either series as from the hand of Giotto himself and he provides some of the most convincing reasons so far for disassociating Giotto completely from the St. Francis cycle. On the positive side he spells out the most cogent reasons for recognizing Giotto in the Isaac scenes. His analysis and interpretation of these two frescoes are to my mind the most exciting passages of the book. In a truly masterly fashion he conducts this piece of research by drawing on style, motifs and quality, by exploring the fitness of figures, their gestures and expressions in accordance with the theme, by searching the settings and the scale for their participation in the interpretation of the given literary subject.

By relating these two scenes to the known work of Giotto and then including them in the oeuvre of the master, one of the basic problems in the history of Western art is encountered. In simple terms it is the problem of attribution, that is connecting anonymous works with a known artistic personality. The only guiding light in such investigations is our idea of creative individuality, its core and its range, which "is shaped to a considerable degree by analogy." Enlarging the oeuvre of one master causes the enlargement of the oeuvre of other masters (p. 2). Thus, what looks like the comparatively simple problem within the history of art turns into the tremendously complex one of a history of artists.

Art history as a humanistic pursuit is very much a contribution of the Italian Renaissance to Western culture. Pride in the artistic achievement of a master, pride in the creations of a province or a community (*vide* Manetti, Ghiberti, Vasari, *et al.*) lead to a critical concern with the growth of art as accomplished by the succeeding generations of artists. Therefore, the majority of books in the field, even in modern times, are monographs, that is, studies of oeuvres, and the books covering a period or cultural phase are sums of monographs strung like pearls on the course of time.

The problem Professor Meiss is discussing is made the more exciting as it combines two great names of the Italian civilization: Giotto, the founder of Western painting, and Assisi, which is synonymous with St. Francis, the national patron saint of Italy. The Upper Church of St. Francis contains the first monumental series of frescoes on the life of St. Francis. It is anonymous. And its anonymity distresses our historical sense which has been nurtured by the concept of personal achievement as put forth by the Renaissance.

Even those who believe that Giotto is responsible to a great extent for bringing about the Renaissance will concede that St. Francis represents rather a revival of an Early Christian attitude than the dawn of the modern era. And many scholars will be happy to argue for retaining Giotto within the medieval period. In other words, are we entitled to project ideas of individuality into periods in which anonymity apparently still had a tinge of virtue just as later non-anonymity became a matter of pride? For earlier periods the name of an artist might be more important to an art historian than to the artist himself. Thus, the establishment of an oeuvre is less relevant than the interpretation of a work.

By attributing the Isaac scenes to Giotto, Meiss preserves the anonymity of the St. Francis cycle. But since the attribution of these scenes is based on their most thorough interpretation, he does more than merely circumscribe Giotto's oeuvre. He adds significantly to our understanding of the Assisi decorations, the function and meaning of which are still very much a matter of debate.

[Karl M. Birkmeyer]



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## Index to Volume 4

ARTICLES	VOL. NO.	PAGE
Buzzi, Giancarlo, <i>Adriano Olivetti</i> . Translated by Salvatore Andriola .....	13-14	105
Buzzi, Giancarlo, <i>Poor Rich and Rich Poor</i> . Translated by Lia Bastone .....	13-14	15
Calvino, Italo, <i>Main Currents in Italian Fiction Today</i> .....	13-14	3
Della Terza, Dante, <i>Leo Spitzer</i> .....	15	62
Della Terza, Dante, <i>Postwar Poetics and Poetry</i> .....	13-14	39
Freccero, John, <i>Mythos and Logos: The Moon and the Bonfires</i> .....	16	3
Hubert, Renée Riese, <i>French Notes on Two Italian Painters</i> .....	16	17
LaPalombara, Joseph, <i>Italian Politics Since the War: A Study in Contrasts</i> .....	13-14	79
Lewis, R. W. B., <i>Elio Vittorini</i> .....	15	55
Mirri, Mario, <i>On Antonio Pace's Benjamin Franklin and Italy</i> .....	16	24
Pacifici, Sergio, <i>A Selected Bibliography of Recent Criticism in English of Contemporary Italian Literature</i> .....	13-14	50
Pandolfi, Vito, <i>Italian Cinema: 1945 to 1960</i> . Translated by Lia Bastone .....	13-14	63
Quackenboss, T. C., <i>Enrico Mattei: The Government in Industry</i> .....	13-14	92
Scaglione, Aldo, <i>Literary Criticism in Postwar Italy</i>	13-14	27
Speroni, Charles, <i>Michelangelo's Letters</i> .....	15	3
Velli, Giuseppe, <i>The Italian Language Today</i> .....	13-14	55
Wellek, René, <i>Italian Criticism After De Sanctis</i> .....	15	30
TRENDS		
Golino, Carlo L., <i>Italian Literary Prizes—1960 Edition</i> .....	16	43

# BOOKS REVIEWED

VOL. NO. PAGE

Avitabile, Grazia, <i>The Controversy on Romanticism in Italy, First Phase 1816-1823</i> (Nicolae Iliescu) .....	15	75
Bishop, Thomas, <i>Pirandello and the French Theater</i> (Neal Oxenhandler) .....	16	56
Bowen, Elizabeth, <i>A Time In Rome</i> (E. F. Mengel)	16	62
Cassola, Carlo, <i>La ragazza di Bube</i> (C. L. G.).....	15	68
Meiss, Millard, <i>Giotto and Assisi</i> (Karl M. Birkmeyer ).....	16	65
Menen, Aubrey, <i>Rome for Ourselves</i> (E. F. Mengel)	16	62
Moravia, Alberto, <i>La Noia</i> (P. M. P.).....	16	58
Pratolini, Vasco, <i>Lo Scialo</i> (C. L. G.).....	15	78
Ridolfi, Roberto, <i>The Life of Girolamo Savonarola</i> (Thomas C. Chubb) .....	15	72
<i>The Poem Itself</i> , edited by Stanley Burnshaw (Filippo Donini) .....	15	69

## ITEMS

No. 15, page 81











